the weekly
Standard

AUGUST 9, 2004

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HENRY JAMES, THE NOVEL
JOSEPH EPSTEIN

THE MEDIA'S CONVENTION ...
by Andrew Ferguson

... AND THE DEMOCRATS'
Gerard Baker, Fred Barnes, Christopher Caldwell, Rachel DiCarlo, William Kristol, Matt Labash, Jonathan V. Last, Katherine Mangu-Ward

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Preen Monster

The night before last week's Democratic convention was set to get underway, John Kerry made a "surprise" early appearance in Boston to attend the rubber match of a three-game Red Sox home stand against the New York Yankees. Kerry aides urged reporters traveling with the campaign to focus their next-day stories on how successfully this gambit had been kept a secret, ostensibly for "security reasons." And many reporters dutifully complied, the trip indeed having been kept a secret from them—if not from the many hundreds of other people necessary to clear Logan Airport's runways for Kerry's arrival, block the city's streets for his motorcade, ready Fenway Park's infield for his ceremonial first pitch, free up some box seats for his entourage, and map out camera assignments for his "impromptu" mid-game national television interview on ESPN.

"Security" requirements being what they are these days, it was only after Kerry's scheduled plane trip to Florida had already gone wheels-up in Columbus, Ohio, that he personally informed his press corps that they were actually on their way to Massachusetts. It is not recorded whether the senator apologized for this hijacking.

But it is recorded how he explained the stunt. "The idea of missing a Yankees-Red Sox series right before a convention week was not acceptable," he offered. "So we changed the policy." The new "policy" being that John Forbes Kerry, a Regular Guy Just Like You and Me, will undertake to prove as much by ostentatious displays of Regular Guy enthusiasm for hometown baseball. Which turns out not to be a new policy at all, actually.

It also turns out he's really bad at it. A few years back, for example, guesting on a Boston sports-radio call-in show, Kerry was asked the obvious question—Who's your all-time favorite BoSock, Senator?—but did not reply with any of the obvious answers. "My favorite Red Sox player of all time," Kerry instead told his astonished host, "is the Walking Man, Eddie Yost." Who never played a single major-league game in a Red Sox uniform. At an Iowa campaign event broadcast by C-SPAN last fall, Kerry treated his audience to a purportedly eyewitness account of the infamous Bill Buckner incident in the 1986 World Series—but got the score and the inning wrong. Just a couple weeks ago, Kerry had occasion publicly to discuss current Red Sox All-Stars "Manny Ortez" and "David Ortez," neither of whom exists.

Last week at Fenway, throwing from Little League distance on the grass, several feet shy of the pitcher's mound, Kerry nevertheless bounced his toss in the dirt—and was booed. During the seventh inning, when the Fenway Jumbotron fixed its eye on a woman in the stands carrying a professionally printed "Team Kerry" poster, the crowd booed again, with gusto. By that point, incidentally, the senator had already finished his spot on ESPN. They'd wanted to know whether Kerry thought the designated-hitter rule should be abolished. And he'd apparently already gotten all that Regular Guy business out of his system—because he never did manage to answer the question one way or the other. ♦

One Nation, Under the Radar

Like a beautiful woman, Michael Moore never arrives on time. He was everywhere in Boston last week, and he was always late. So his various event hosts invariably found themselves vamping awkwardly onstage while their increasingly irritable audiences wondered what the hell was going on—and while THE SCRAPBOOK was happily writing everything down. Our favorite episode: Tuesday's "Take Back America" forum at which Moore was scheduled to speak after Howard Dean but, alas, was nowhere to be seen once Dean was done. First, emcee Roger Hickey tried to calm the crowd by announcing that "Michael Moore is on his way!" That kind of thing only works once, though, so before long Hickey had been forced to rush not one, not two, but three lower-billed speechmakers into early duty. Finally, after almost an hour and a half of this, Hickey took the stage to report that "Michael Moore is in the house!" A cheer went up. Hickey formally introduced his star attraction. Another cheer went up. Necks craned. A third round of applause got underway, accompanied by chants: "Mi-chael! Mi-chael!"

But still: No sign of Moore.

Eventually, the place went silent and the mood turned grumpy and Roger Hickey got desperate and started plugging a list of lefty-leaning media outlets and "documentary" productions. He told the crowd to go see *Outfoxed*. They cheered. He told the crowd to listen to Air America. They cheered. He told them to read the *American Prospect*. They cheered. "*Salon*!" someone helpfully shouted from the floor. "And *Salon*, too," a grateful Hickey boomed into the microphone. "*BuzzFlash*!" somebody else yelled. "And *BuzzFlash*," Hickey responded.

And then: "The *Nation*!" cried Katrina vanden Heuvel—its editor—from the back of the room. "The *Nation*," she repeated.

But Ms. vanden Heuvel was ignored. Apparently they weren't that desperate. ♦

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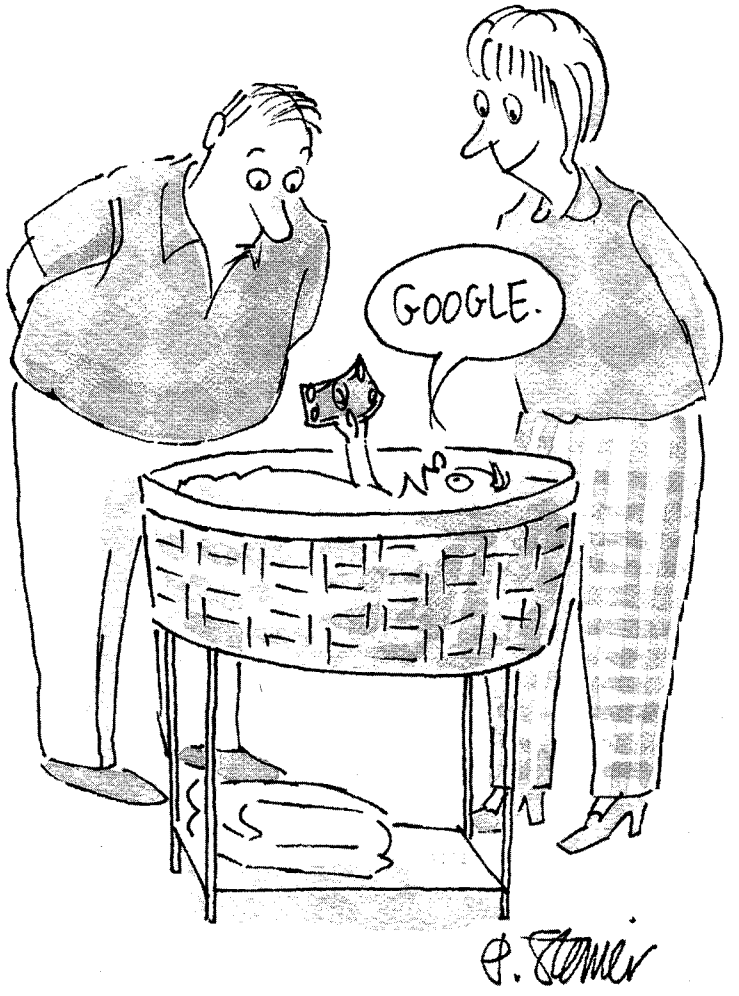

Mr. Mischer's Mishap

You didn't think we were just going to ignore it, did you? Here, then, a full, unexpurgated transcript of the audio feed CNN broadcast from the Democratic convention last Thursday immediately following John Kerry's acceptance speech:

DON MISCHER, CONVENTION PRODUCER: Go, balloons. I don't see anything happening. Go, balloons. Go, balloons. Go, balloons. Stand by, confetti. Keep coming, balloons. More balloons. Bring them. Balloons, balloons, balloons! More balloons.

Tons of them. Bring them down. Let them all come. No confetti. No confetti yet. No confetti. All right. Go, balloons. Go, balloons. We're getting more balloons. All balloons. All balloons should be going.

Come on, guys! Let's move it. Jesus. We need more balloons. I want all balloons to go. Go, confetti. Go, confetti. Go, confetti. I want more balloons.

What's happening to the balloons? We need more balloons. We need all of them coming down. Go, balloons. Balloons. What's happening, balloons? There's not enough coming down. All balloons!

Why the hell is nothing falling? What the f— are you guys doing up there?

We want more balloons coming down. More balloons. More balloons . . .

WOLF BLITZER, CNN ANCHOR: All right. While those balloons are coming down, what you heard was the voice of Don Mischer. He's the director for the Democratic party—the organizer of this convention. He's been giving instructions to let the balloons come down, there are thousands, and, in fact, these balloons are about to land on our heads here on the floor of the convention. Don Mischer giving instructions, "Let the balloons come down. Let the confetti come down." Jeff Greenfield, this has been a very well-organized convention, but the balloons are not coming down as rapidly as they would like.

JEFF GREENFIELD, CNN SENIOR POLITICAL ANALYST: Right, the first crisis of the convention, and it's almost to the close. You'll remember in 1980 in New York that Jimmy Carter's balloons trickled down one by one, what was seen to be an omen. We have to be looking at this as obviously not a turning point of the campaign. But these balloons did not come *en masse* the way Don Mischer [UNINTELLIGIBLE], and we heard him express that feeling somewhat emphatically.

JUDY WOODRUFF, CNN ANCHOR: We did. We heard—we may have heard a profanity, Wolf. You know, it was an accident to leave the microphone open. But, you know, they are—I'm looking up now, Wolf. There are still a lot of balloons. I don't know if our camera can show. Could we zoom in a little bit? You can see there are still a lot of balloons that have not come down yet.

BLITZER: This has really frustrated people, that balloons are not coming down as quickly, but—you know what? —they will be down here very quickly, I suspect, and all of us on the floor of the convention will be inundated.

Let's talk a little bit about the speech, what we just heard from John Kerry . . . ♦

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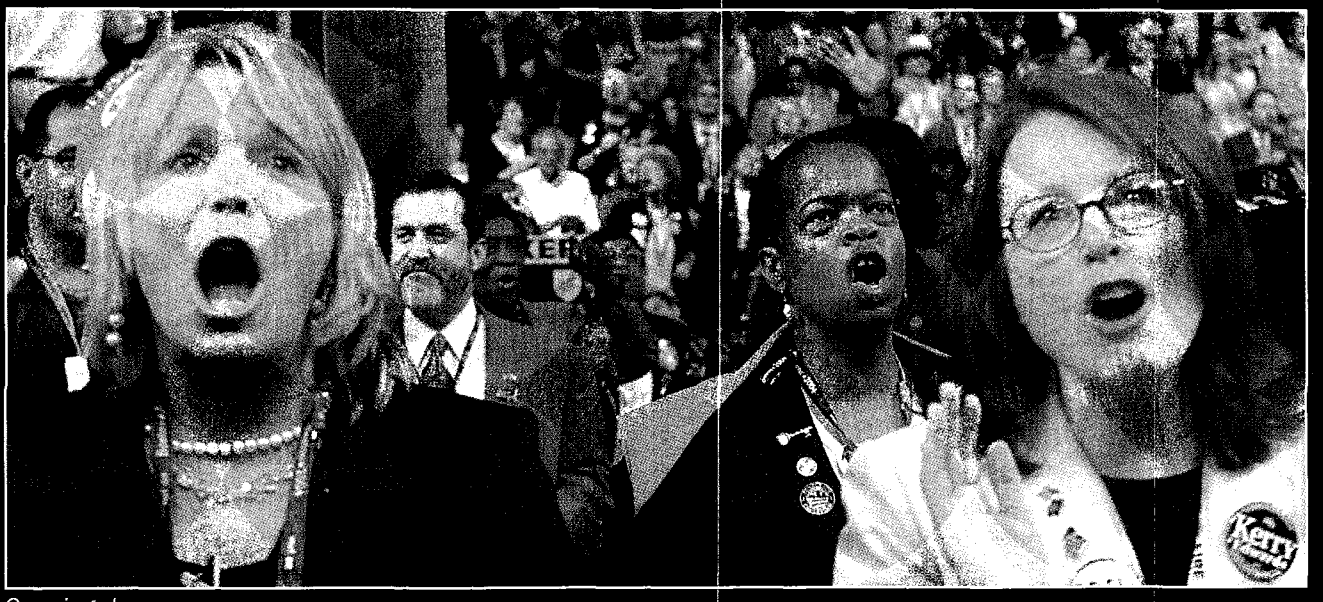
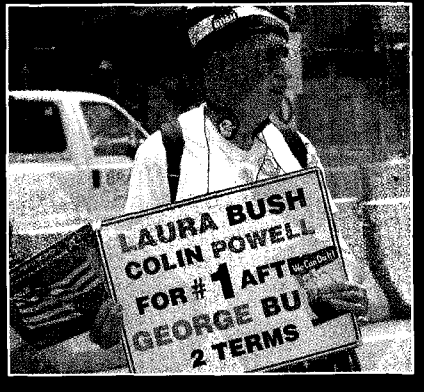
Worth About 12,000 Words



Opening day

Planned Parenthood

Al Gore



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★SPECIAL★ CONVENTION Scrapbook

Michael Moore and worshipers

Dennis Kucinich

Robert Reich

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Casual

(Cupped) Hands Across America

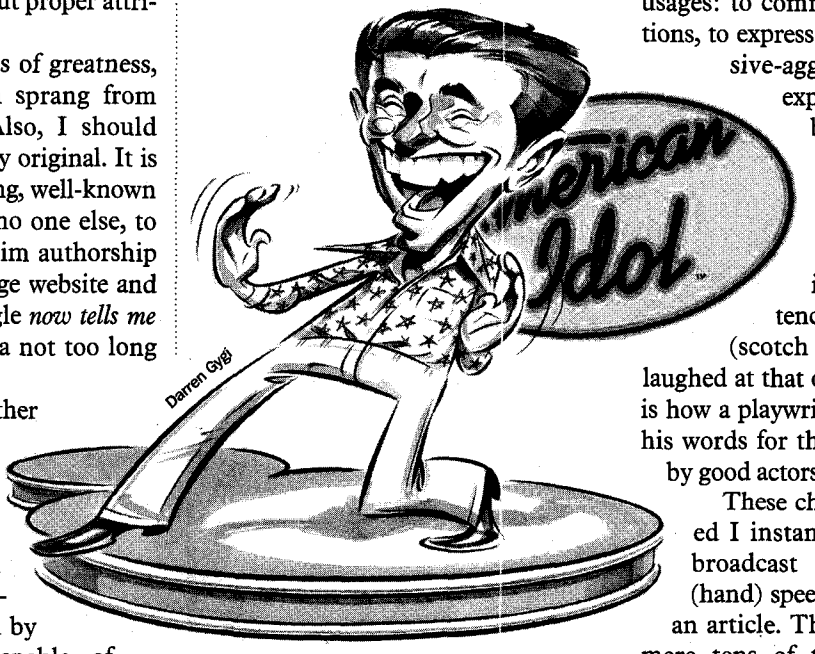
Most writers are desperate to coin a phrase—to tattoo a saying on the body of the English language. I myself don't suffer from this craving. It so happens I've already seen an invention of mine taken up by strangers. By now, in fact, my innovation has been circulating for weeks. You may already be using it (almost certainly without proper attribution).

Like many instances of greatness, my little contribution sprang from modest beginnings. Also, I should mention it's not entirely original. It is a variation on an existing, well-known rhetorical device, but no one else, to my knowledge, can claim authorship (aside from one language website and the *Onion*, which Google *now tells me* both had the same idea not too long ago).

Anyway, without further credit-sharing—cymbals and fireworks, get ready—I give you my new thing: air parentheses. Inspired by air quotes, those low-class hand signals used by annoying people incapable of selective emphasis through simple word choice and intonation, my air parentheses promise to sweep the nation. Subtext, self-contradiction, that leave-'em-laughing (exit stage right) final spin of fine repartee—all this air parentheses make easier.

No, I didn't realize right away that my coinage might just be the next "Don't go there." A couple of friends were visiting. I can't even remember what we were talking about, but lately I'd been enamored of lines that work as standing contradictions. Example: He'd be a handsome guy if it weren't for that face. Maybe that's what inspired me to make my move.

It's tricky business, this translating punctuation for hands (one wonders how deaf people do it), but in that instant I foresaw what was about to happen: I'd deliver my joke—a contradiction along the lines of "Oh, no I like her a lot (when she's unconscious)"—as I cupped my hands in front of me to form a dueling pair of facing C's. One of our friends would ask, "What was that?" Then I'd tell them.



Which is exactly what happened. And our friends loved it. For the next hour or so, we made nothing but undercutting parenthetical asides. And the next day, I forgot the whole thing.

Immortality could so easily have slipped from my grasp.

But a few weeks later, one of our friends—we'll call her friend number one, for the historic role she was about to play—came to visit again, this time bringing several others. They were all heading out to a concert with my wife, while I was to stay home to watch our child. I was in good-sport mode, icing the beer, and, despite the rain, grilling up some burgers for the gang (most of whom I hadn't met before). And when I dashed inside with a fresh round of beer, I came upon this gratifying scene.

Friend number one had just given the others a lesson in the use of air parentheses, and all were taking to them like sopranos to the high notes. They were even improving on my repertoire. The basic weakness of my air parentheticals is that, in the wrong hands (!), they might degenerate into a barely updated version of "Not!" that moronic cliché from the '90s. My new best friends solved this problem by coming up with a huge array of usages: to communicate stage directions, to express subtext, to make passive-aggressive sentiments explicit—"No, you're the boss (when I'm not here)"—and many, many more.

Particularly nice were some examples in the middle of a sentence: "Yes, I'd like some (scotch and) water." Oh, we laughed at that one. This, I imagined, is how a playwright must feel hearing his words for the first time rendered by good actors.

These charming people insisted I instantly take measures to broadcast my new figure of (hand) speech. I decided to write an article. The drawback was that mere tens of thousands of people would see it. If only there were a way to showcase my air parentheses on television, on something like *American Idol*, but for writers. Or an Olympic event for novel locutions. I'm taking suggestions. It seems a shame to just leave my air parentheses to work their way through the population two hands at a time.

Even if you don't have any suggestions, please feel free to stop me on the street (I'll be the creative one with the witty hands) and tell me what you really think (!@#$%^&*) of my terrific idea.

David Skinner

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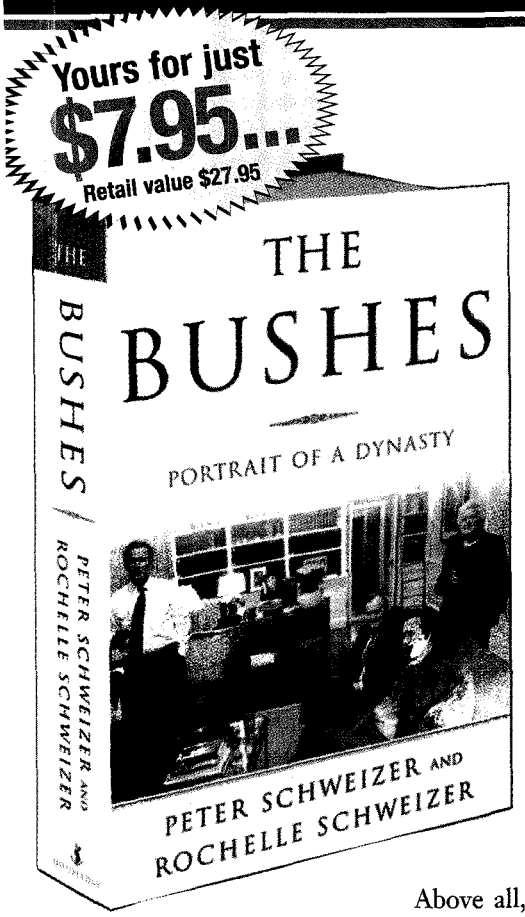
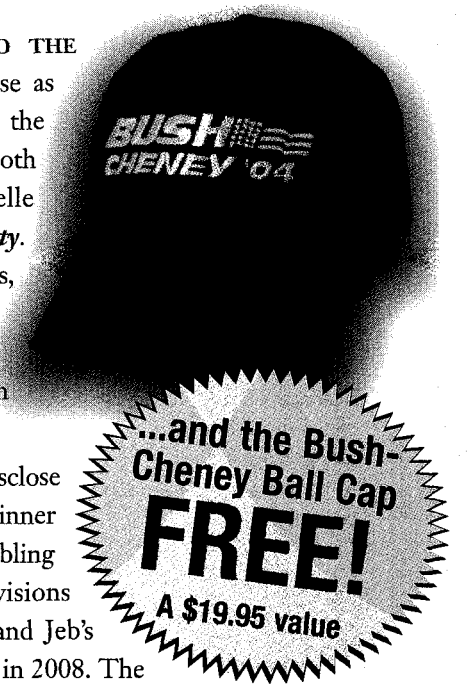
The Untold Story of the Remarkable Rise of the Bush Dynasty



"THE SCHWEIZERS HAVE PENETRATED TO THE HEART OF THE BUSH FAMILY. This is as close as anyone has ever been able to get." That's the assessment of Doug Wead, a former aide to both Bush presidents, about Peter and Rochelle Schweizer's ***The Bushes: Portrait of a Dynasty***. In this first full-scale biography of the Bushes, the Schweizers show why the Bushes have quietly come to outshine even the Kennedys in their power and influence on the American scene.



In this illuminating book, the Schweizers disclose never-before-revealed information about the inner workings of the Bush clan—including the sibling rivalry between George W. and Jeb; divisions between father and son over the Iraq war; and Jeb's plans to take on Hillary and run for President in 2008. The Schweizers also delve into the Bushes' secret business dealings and detail how their shrewd alliances with other American dynasties—including the Kennedys, Rockefellers and Tafts—have all helped to consolidate their power within the Republican Party.

Above all, we see George W. Bush as his family sees him: an intensely driven, deeply religious man with a patriot's heart. Relying on statements from close Bush family members, the Schweizers explain how the President deals with the stresses of the war on terrorism, how he sees it as a religious war, and how his profound Christian faith influences what he says and does.

The Bushes highlights the qualities that have made this family more successful than any other political family in American history—and assures them a long future on our nation's political stage.

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Talking Turkey

Christopher Caldwell's insightful analysis of Turkey ("The Turkey Paradox," July 26) deserves amplification. Turkey's democratic blossoming is irreversible as, independent of European Union membership, it rests on an overwhelming popular consensus.

For generations after Atatürk's abolition of the caliphate, traditional Islamic garb communicated belligerent opposition to the trappings of Western civilization (including democracy, freedom of religion, and freedom of speech). Time and experience have largely stripped headscarves and veils of this overt political connotation. Turkey's push for greater recognition of Islam in public life testifies to its growing democratic maturity and confidence.

Bruce Fein
Washington, DC

Hatfill's Day in Court

The ongoing case of *Hatfill* v. *Kristof* deserves far more than just a mention in your Scrapbook (July 26). It is a perfect example of how freedom of the press blinds journalists and press institutions such as the *New York Times* to the problem of trial lawyers.

If an employee of McDonald's or Halliburton, for example, had defamed Dr. Hatfill in such a way that he could not find work, that employee would face a very different day in court than Nicholas Kristof. As it is, Kristof may hide behind the First Amendment to excuse his slandering of an innocent man's reputation.

But just imagine if Kristof and the *Times* were actually held to the same standards as everyone else. In the hands of a good trial lawyer, the *Hatfill* case would be a perfect opportunity for a jury to, in the parlance of our times, "send a message" to "Big Media" by way of a multi-million-dollar judgment.

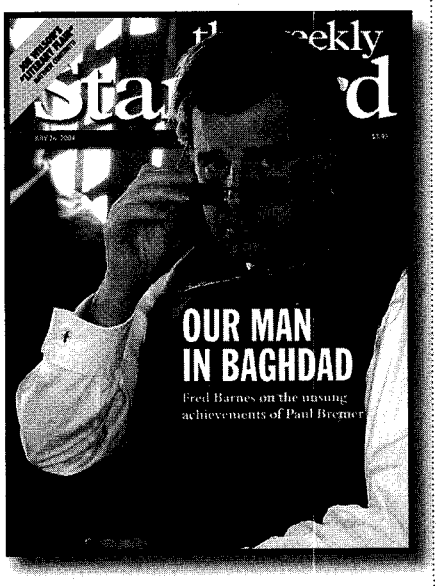
If, indeed, Kristof and the *New York Times* had to spend one day in front of a jury without some strained First Amendment-based defense to protect them, they might have a very different outlook on tort reform.

Kurt Reiger
Oklahoma City, OK

Hey, Mr. Wilson!

I would like to applaud Matthew Continetti for his terrific article on the Joe Wilson scandal ("'A Little Literary Flair,'" July 26). It is by far the best piece on the subject I have read to date.

As a retired military intelligence officer, I had plenty of dealings with CIA and State Department types during my 17 years of overseas duty. Whereas the diplomatic types were almost always very political and had little use for the military, CIA operatives were generally politically circumspect to a fault. I mention this because it seems to me that a silent but apparent thread running through the Wilson story is the political activism of his CIA wife, Valerie Plame.



It seems likely to me that Plame was responsible for Wilson's trip to Niger. I find this shocking, just as I find shocking the release of an anti-Bush book by an "anonymous" (but active) CIA employee. Has the agency become an openly politicized organization? If so, this is outrageous.

With regard to Wilson, he is clearly a self-serving liar who loves himself more than he loves his country. Of course, I doubt that any of the mainstream media figures who trumpeted his lies will step forward to apologize and correct the record. Thank goodness we have writers like Continetti to help get the truth out.

John Eikelbarner
Daly City, CA

Matthew Continetti has written a fine article on the Joe Wilson affair. While the whole ordeal says much about Wilson and the seemingly willful gullibility of the mainstream media, it also speaks volumes about the CIA.

To wit: The CIA's original decision to send Wilson to Niger was odd for several reasons. Aside from the fact that Wilson knew two people in the Nigerien government, he had no expertise on the subject at hand. He was a well-known and vociferous critic of the Bush administration, so the agency would have to treat his conclusions with due skepticism. In addition, by hiring Wilson, the CIA was basically subcontracting its own business to someone outside the agency.

All in all, the agency's choice of Wilson as unofficial envoy to Niger made very little sense.

Richard DiNardo
Stafford, VA

Wall of Shame?

In regard to Max Boot's article on the West Bank barrier ("The Moral Low Ground," July 26): If the fence were built wholly within the boundaries of Israeli territory, there would be no reason for the World Court, or any other body, to condemn it. But, as the court points out, the fence is tantamount to a virtual annexation of Palestinian land.

No serious person questions Israel's right to self-defense. But self-defense does not justify extending this barrier into Palestinian territory.

Henry Clifford
Wainscott, NY

• • •

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The Last Refuge

Unwilling to articulate a serious policy agenda, unable to explain why his record qualifies him to be president, John Kerry fled Thursday night to the refuge of patriotism.

Kerry's convention speech was in some respects competent, in some respects pedestrian, in some respects bizarre. But it sure was patriotic. And perhaps to good political effect. After all, the American people are patriotic. Over the last quarter century, they have often suspected that elements of the Democratic party are not as patriotic as they are—or not patriotic in the same uncomplicated, straightforward way. In the peaceful 1990s, this suspicion did little damage to Democratic presidential candidates. But the 1990s ended on September 11, 2001. Now we are at war. So John Kerry wrapped the flag tightly around himself in his acceptance speech in order to convince Americans doubtful about President Bush that they could safely go ahead and vote to remove him, and put Kerry in charge.

This strategy may not work. But it is not stupid. What, after all, were Kerry's alternatives?

Should he in his speech have emphasized his public record? Kerry feels entitled to the presidency ("I'm not kidding. I was born in the West Wing"), but he has done remarkably little in two decades in the Senate to support a claim to it ("When I came to the Senate, I broke with many in my own party to vote for a balanced budget, because I thought it was the right thing to do. I fought to put 100,000 police officers on the streets of America. And then I reached out across the aisle with John McCain to work to find the truth about our POWs and missing in action and to finally make peace in Vietnam").

Should Kerry have taken a clear position on the Iraq war? Too risky. On the one hand, a plurality of the American people now say they oppose having gone to war to remove Saddam. On the other hand, Kerry doesn't want to be accused of favoring leaving Saddam in power. So he dodged the issue by suggesting that the current commander in chief "misled" us into war. Kerry also vowed "to get the job done" in Iraq without saying what the "job" is, and to "bring our troops home" without saying how or when or under what conditions he would, or would not, cut and run.

Should Kerry have used his speech to articulate a coherent foreign policy for moving forward? Too difficult. So he simply claimed to be ready to be commander in chief and gave a 45-minute speech so vague that it mentioned no actual countries other than Iraq and Vietnam—not Afghanistan, not Iran, not North Korea, not China.

Should Kerry have elaborated on his view that our nation's "time-honored tradition" is that "the United States of America never goes to war because we want to; we only go to war because we have to"? Yet he might then have had to explain not only why he voted for war in Iraq, but also why he supported our military efforts in Somalia, Haiti, and the Balkans—surely not instances where we "had" to fight to "protect against a threat."

Should Kerry have come clean that the Democrats remain, in their heart and soul, a pre-9/11 party? Kerry suggested as much when he said, "Let's not forget what we did in the 1990s. . . . We just need to believe in ourselves and we can do it again," and when he exhorted, "We need to make America once again a beacon in the world"—presumably meaning as it was around 1999. But as Kerry himself had to acknowledge, "the world tonight is very different from the world of four years ago."

Should Kerry have elaborated on his claim to yearn for the days right after September 11, 2001, when we were united to "meet the danger"? How could he? He could not even bring himself in his speech to praise the removal of the Taliban and the liberation of the people of Afghanistan.

So Kerry made a reasonable political judgment when he chose to wrap himself in Old Glory on Thursday night. He wants to be an acceptable alternative should the American people choose to replace President Bush. But that puts the ball back in Bush's court.

What Bush needs to do is simple: make the positive case for his reelection—for his stewardship of the country since September 11, for the war in Iraq, for his overall success in the global war on terror. He should spend August making this positive argument, and mostly ignoring Kerry.

The Democratic nominee has shunned substance for patriotic atmospherics. He has failed to provide a real argument for himself, or against the incumbent president. He has therefore given President Bush an open field and a fair chance to make the case for his reelection.

—*William Kristol*

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The Commander in Chief Thing

The Democrats decide to fight Bush on national security. BY FRED BARNES

IS THE PRESIDENTIAL RACE John Kerry's to lose? After a successful Democratic convention and an adequate but uninspiring acceptance speech, Kerry would never say so publicly. But that's what he and his advisers believe. Their theory is that the country has fundamentally made up its mind that President Bush shouldn't have a second term. After all, his reelect number—the share of the electorate that thinks he deserves another four years—is only 43 percent. So Bush would need almost all of the undecided vote to tilt his way, but normally they wind up voting two-to-one for the challenger. That's Kerry. Besides, political analyst Charlie Cook has studied the undecided and found them to be overwhelmingly anti-Bush. All Kerry has to do is make himself minimally acceptable.

It won't be that simple. This is a peculiar election, and for that reason alone victory is hardly in Kerry's grasp already. He must fight off an unconventional Bush campaign. Bush long ago realized he couldn't run a stay-the-course reelection campaign, standard for successful incumbents from Richard Nixon in 1972 to Ronald Reagan in 1984 to Bill Clinton in 1996. To win a second term, they relied on the accomplishments of their first term plus their popularity. That won't work for Bush. Why? Because the electorate has changed, and Bush is too controversial.

"This will be more like 1884 than 1984," says a senior adviser in the Bush campaign. Like today, the nation was evenly divided between Democrats and Republicans in 1884, and there wasn't an abundance of swing voters or ticket splitters. Bush strategists figure that swing voters, once 20 percent of the electorate, are roughly half that now. Ticket-splitters have also dipped, from 17 percent in 1988 to 7 to 10 percent now. (There's overlap with the two voting blocs.) And the final outcome of the president's boldest initiative, the war in Iraq, is uncertain.

So Bush now embarks on a contrast campaign in which he'll use every tool at his disposal—TV ads, his own statements, campaign events, speeches by leading Republicans—to compare himself favorably with Kerry. He'll also "pivot" into emphasizing his agenda for a second term. He touched on this in a July 21 speech: "During the next four years, we'll help more citizens to own their health plan, to own a piece of their retirement, to own their own home or their own small business. We'll usher in a new era of ownership in America." Bush will spell out more details in the weeks before the Republican convention, saving the "big nuggets" for his acceptance speech. The convention begins August 30.

As you'd expect, the president's advisers insist his vision for a second term will overshadow Kerry's themes. "Kerry has no vision, no plan," one says. But the contrast that's bound to attract more attention is on national security. The Kerry campaign stressed his supposed strength on this issue—and especially on the war against terror—throughout the convention. The dominant idea was that Kerry's record of bravery as a young naval lieutenant in Vietnam shows he'd be a strong president today. That's a dubious proposition—a non sequitur really—but neither Kerry nor any other Democrat was embarrassed about pushing it. "I defended this country as a young man and I will defend it as president," Kerry said in his acceptance speech. John Edwards, Kerry's vice presidential running mate, was even more explicit about the Vietnam connection. Kerry was decisive and strong in Vietnam, Edwards said. "Aren't these the traits you want in a commander in chief?"

In talking up Kerry, Edwards and other Democrats left a 35-year gap in Kerry's biography: from his return from Vietnam to the present. These forgotten years include Kerry's two decades in the Senate when he was consistently dovish on national security—right up until this past March when he locked up the presidential nomination. The Bush campaign has already produced ads contrasting Kerry's positions then—voting against weapons systems, supporting cuts in military and intelligence spending, opposing aid to freedom fighters, and attacking President Reagan's hard-line policy toward the Soviet Union—with what he says now, and with Bush's positions. Kerry is a ripe target.

If the Bush campaign were not so disciplined, it might have aired some of these ads already. But it decided to wait until voters are paying attention. One TV spot is expected to contrast Kerry's changing position on the $87 billion appropriation to fund the troops in Iraq. Kerry first suggested that voting against the $87 billion would be "irresponsible," and doing so would mean "abandoning the troops." Then he voted against the $87 billion. Another contrast ad skewers Kerry so effectively, a Bush aide says, "it's painful to watch." These ads are to be aired sparingly in August, then used with full force after Labor Day.

The Bush campaign always intended to draw a sharp contrast with Kerry on national security and the war on terror. But now that Kerry has elevated these issues, indeed staked

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his candidacy on them, it will not seem forced for Bush to concentrate on them. In Boston, Kerry surrounded himself with military brass and former crewmates in Vietnam. Bush will rub shoulders with many more retired generals and admirals in New York. Kerry can't complain. He's made national security the premier issue of the campaign. The underlying Bush theme, of course, is that Kerry can't be trusted to be a strong leader given his Senate voting record, no matter what he says now or what he did in Vietnam.

Bush has plenty of material to work with. Last week at the convention, the Republican National Committee released an 11-minute tape of Kerry's changing positions on Iraq. It's devastating. As primary rival Howard Dean gains among Democrats with his anti-Iraq war message, Kerry goes soft and finally opposes the $87 billion. He caves to political expediency. A *New Yorker* article on Kerry's foreign policy reinforces this conclusion. A Kerry adviser is quoted as saying, "Off the record, he did it because of Dean." And Democratic senator Joe Biden makes a similar point, saying Kerry sought "to prove to Dean's guys I'm not a warmonger."

As luck would have it for Bush, Kerry and Edwards have also turned 9/11 into a major campaign issue. Just a few months ago, Democrats criticized Bush angrily for an ad that included a fleeting glimpse of Ground Zero in New York City. They claimed he was inappropriately politicizing the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Bush backed off. But now Democrats have embraced the issue noisily. "It's now been over one thousand days since the September 11th terrorist attacks changed our nation," Sen. Bob Graham of Florida declared in his convention speech. "One thousand days after the attack on Pearl Harbor, America . . . was rolling to victory in World War II. In this new war on terror, we have not yet secured the beachhead. John Kerry and John Edwards will."

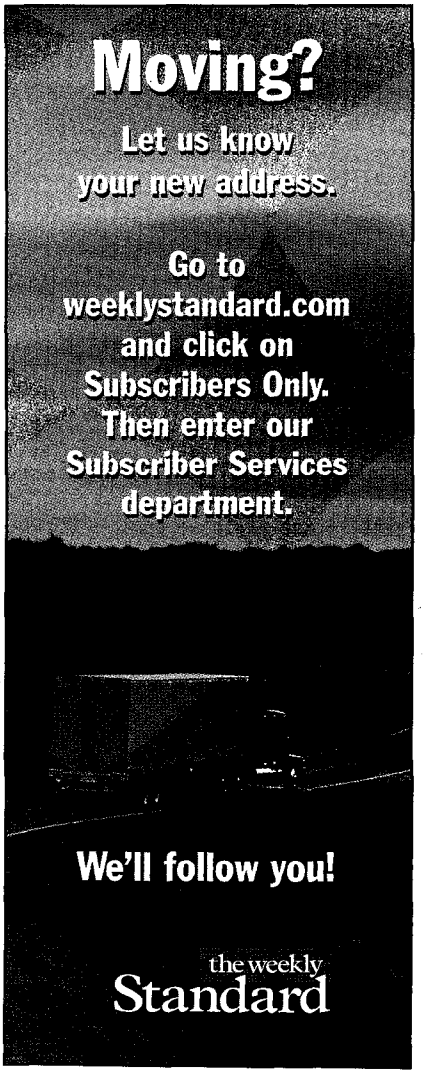
Nonetheless, Democrats want to have it both ways: They can exploit 9/11, but Bush shouldn't touch the issue. "Do not dare use 9/11 for political purposes," New York attorney general Eliot Spitzer warned. Nonsense, responded former New York mayor Rudy Giuliani. Democrats have freed Bush to invoke 9/11 to his heart's content. And it's an issue that works better for him than for Kerry.

Kerry has skillfully milked his four months in Vietnam for everything it's worth and then some. Never has a candidate made so much out of so short a military tour of duty. The question is how much it really helps his campaign. For sure, it doesn't hurt. But war heroes don't have a great record of political success. Democrat George McGovern was a bomber pilot in World War II but suffered a landslide loss in 1972. In 1996, Republican Bob Dole contrasted his bravery in World War II with Clinton's avoidance of military service. It got him nowhere. Four years earlier, the elder George Bush was bounced from the White House by Clinton despite his brave duty as a pilot in World War II. "Military service didn't do enough for any of them," says a Bush strategist. And it may not for Kerry either.

He had two choices in dealing with his Senate record on national security: explain it or ignore it. He opted for the second. But nothing piques the interest of reporters like a politician's attempt to play down or hide something. Kerry might have been better off explaining. He could have said he'd learned a lot, even changed his mind, since the Cold War. He could have said he was traumatized by 9/11. Instead, Kerry's sudden emergence as a hawk in the war on terror looks entirely political. It bolsters the Bush case that Kerry can't be trusted.

But a strong case against Kerry on national security won't necessarily prevail in the election. Voters may decide old Senate votes or flip-flops on Iraq don't matter, while Kerry's promise to win the war on terror does. In 1980, President Carter's strategists believed that once voters learned of Reagan's radically conservative views, they'd reject him. Voters didn't care. In 1992, Republicans figured the evidence against Bill Clinton—draft dodging, womanizing, no experience in foreign policy—was sufficient to turn off a majority of voters. But Republicans were wrong.

It may be different this time. In 1980, the circumstances were right for a hard-liner in the White House, not a squishy dove like Carter. In 1992, the Cold War was over. So the elder Bush's strength, foreign affairs, was suddenly extraneous. Now both Kerry and Bush have vowed to win the war against terrorists. Bush's credentials in this war are better than Kerry's, and the case he's mounting against Kerry on national security is strong. So I think the race is not Kerry's to lose but Bush's to win. But I've been wrong before. ♦



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Putting Out More Flags

The Democrats redefine themselves.

BY CHRISTOPHER CALDWELL

Boston

SOME PARENTS probably had visions of incontinence on long family car trips when Alexandra Kerry promised Thursday night that, should her father become president, our children will be able to "control their own bodies." But if the reference went over the heads of confused Middle Americans, abortion advocates had no trouble recognizing it as a bone thrown their way by the Democratic campaign. Kerry's own challenge to President Bush—"Let's never misuse for political purposes the most precious document in American history, the Constitution of the United States"—will have been received in living rooms across the nation as an insistence that James Madison be given his due. Gay activists, however, surely recognized the allusion to Kerry's opposition to a constitutional amendment to block gay marriage.

To nobody's surprise, there were two conventions. First, there was the daily grind of party work, held for the benefit of activist delegates, who this year were more hard-line than ever before. Only 2 percent of them are pro-life, according to the *Boston Globe*; 95 percent of them think the war on Iraq was a mistake. Second, there was the prime-time convention shown to 40 million citizens, during which John Kerry spoke of his faith, and both he and his vice-presidential nominee solemnly took up their wartime responsibilities and promised to increase the size of the military.

If Republicans hope to convince the public that the "real" Democratic party is a bunch of extremist double-talkers, they are overconfident. True, there were moments of brazen disingenuousness last week, the most arresting being Madeleine Albright's vow that a Kerry administration would combat weapons of mass destruction by "focusing on where they are instead of where they are not"—this after Albright had *supported* the invasion of Iraq, based on information about WMD gathered on *her* watch.

The week had its dud speeches, too, which will do the Democrats some damage. There was Jimmy Carter, blaming the Bush administration for failures of the Clinton Middle East peace process that happened before Bush took office. There was Ted Kennedy, blundering through his speech (patriots at Lexington and Concord, he said, "fired the shirt round the world"), with its sour little jokes and the vote-repelling blitheness with which he quipped, "The only thing we have to fear is four more years of George Bush."

There was Al Sharpton, calling for reparations for slavery and (as he surely intended) stomping on the groundbreaking speech of Barack Obama the night before, in which Obama made the case that the inner-city poor need not count on government to solve their every problem.

Perhaps most electorally harmful, given the personality-focused way campaigns are covered nowadays, was Teresa Heinz Kerry's paean to her own self-assertiveness, in which she was permitted to vent the delusion that hers is the candor of a feminist who had fought for her rights, rather than a billionairess who is simply used to being listened to. This is leaving aside her galling attempt to recast her upbringing in the upper reaches of Mozambican society under colonial dictatorship, and her education in apartheid South Africa, as human-rights credentials, rather than the opposite.

But even if its effects were achieved partly through code and judicious scheduling, the Democratic convention in Boston was the most successful party gathering in decades. It began a wholesale redefinition of an exhausted party and provided voters with a blizzard of uplifting patriotic imagery, boldly tacking against the most deeply held conventional wisdom. All pollsters—including the Democratic guru Stanley Greenberg, whose wife, Connecticut congresswoman Rosa DeLauro, headed the platform committee—had predicted since the 2000 elections that the next presidential race would be decided "base to base," and that whichever party did the best job of stirring up its activists would win.

Instead, the Democratic party has asked its activists to shut up for a sec so it can talk to the broad American middle class. And the party talked stirringly. Every speech in prime time—every single one—used the word "patriot." Virtually all the prime-time speeches quoted from either the Constitution or the Declaration of Independence or Lincoln. You would have thought you'd stumbled into a gathering of Straussians. Democrats sought to show that they were patriotic enough to protect the country from terrorism, and did so by dragging dozens of uniformed Democrats on stage over the last two nights, rather as Republicans used blacks at the 2000 Philadelphia convention. (Some of my best friends are in the military!) Democrats are campaigning as if they have discovered the open-sesame of the military vote—the "backdoor draft" that keeps reservists on active service long after the Be-All-That-You-Can-Be ads had promised them they

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Lev Nisnevitch

John Kerry accepts the nomination; every speech at the convention used the word "patriot."

would be back in grad school.

In this attempt to seize the imagination of independents and centrists, and to recast themselves as the party of common sense, Democrats made a bold raid on the Republican rhetorical arms cache. Speaker after speaker invoked President Bush's own self-description in 2000 as "a uniter, not a divider," and asked voters to be the judges of the president's record of unifying them. The Bush promise to "restore honor and integrity to the White House" was subtly mocked in Kerry's insistence that he would "restore trust and credibility to the White House." Democrats also made use of that staple of religious revivals, the conversion narrative. And not just Ron Reagan's "apolitical" endorsement of Kerry. Every ten minutes or so, every day of the convention, short video snippets of Republicans who were sick of Bush and had decided either to change their party affiliation, or simply to vote for Kerry this time out, were projected on the walls at either side of the dais.

It is easier to see what the Democrats are trying to do if one compares them with the left in other Western countries. In most places, the left is obviously a two-headed thing. There is a party (let's say the Social Democrats in Germany) that has a proud record of winning benefits for the working class through the past century, and an even prouder record of summoning its members to the service of the country. Such parties' problem is that the economy on which their success was built exists no longer, and their economic platform consists of riding a failing welfare state into the abyss. Then there is another party (let's say the Greens in Germany) who represent the cream of the 1960s generation. They are inspired and energetic, and understand the global economy and such modern concerns as mass immigration and the environment. Their problem is that they can rally at most an eighth of the electorate behind the idea of a technocratic Baby Boomer ruling class.

It is the Democrats' great good fortune that the two parties they comprise are disguised as one. This allows them to use the history of the industrial-age patriots who won World War II to lay claim to power for the postmodern, perhaps post-national visionaries who come out of the better grad schools. And they are extremely lucky to have a candidate like John Kerry, a pure product of the new camp with the one credential—military heroism—that is unimpeachable in the old one.

It is easy to be deluded into believing one party's story before you've heard both sides. But in Boston, the Democrats have told their story with far more skill than parties usually do, and have made a far more damaging assault on the pillars of the Republican voter coalition than even the most pessimistic Republican could have feared. ♦

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The Surprise Party

What you can learn from a little platform diving.

BY GERARD BAKER

HOW GOOD is your knowledge of the political parties' platforms for November's presidential election?

Which party says that the most pressing priorities the nation faces in the next four years are winning the global war against terror, stopping the spread of weapons of mass destruction, and promoting democracy and freedom in the world, starting with a peaceful and stable Iraq?

Which party promises to achieve these aims by transforming the U.S. military through technological innovation and investment, adding 40,000 soldiers, doubling the size of the Pentagon's Special Forces, and ending America's dependence on Middle Eastern oil?

Here's a clue: This same party says it will try to build global alliances, but will "never wait for a green light from abroad" to defend the country against new threats. It pledges unstinting support for Israel and promises to help it retain the qualitative edge necessary for its security. While it supports the creation of a Palestinian state (but under new and responsible leadership), it says it is "unrealistic to expect that the outcome of final status negotiations will be a full and complete return to the armistice lines of 1949."

Elsewhere in the world, the party says, a nuclear-armed Iran is an "unacceptable" risk; the United States should continue the six-party talks with North Korea, but should have "no illusions" about Kim Jong Il. It wants to strengthen the Patriot Act to make it harder for terrorists to launder money through the United States.

Congratulations if you picked the party of Edward Kennedy, Al Sharpton, Howard Dean, and Dennis Kucinich.

All right, I'll confess this was a slightly selective reading of *Strong at Home, Respected in the World*, the 37-page blueprint for a John Kerry-John Edwards administration.

In between the startlingly martial policy prescriptions was some familiar knockabout stuff about how President Bush has alienated the world, bullied allies, and diminished respect for America. But when you strip out the rhetorical barbs, you would be surprised at how much like a paper on Republican national security strategy it sounds.

Just as remarkable as what is in the Democratic platform is what has been left out. Liberal environmentalists will search in vain for any kindly reference to the Kyoto Treaty on global warming. International jurists will find not an encouraging word about the Rome Treaty on the International Criminal Court. Indeed, fans of the United Nations in general will be disappointed; there is some muted criticism of the way President Bush handled the U.N. in the war in Iraq, but not the slightest suggestion that it will be at the center of U.S. foreign policy in a Kerry-Edwards administration.

Nothing in the Democratic platform in fact comes close to justifying the claim it makes right at the start: "This November the choice we face as Americans may have more impact on our people and our place in the world than any in our lifetimes."

The Democrats are fighting this presidential election on their most aggressive foreign policy manifesto in almost half a century. For all their criticism of President Bush's foreign policy, it seems they have decided the safest way to trump the incumbent is to look even tougher.

The party left nothing to chance at its convention in Boston last week in its determination to demonstrate to a skeptical but interested public its national security credentials. No fewer than four generals addressed the 5,000 cheering, clapping delegates. A parade of top brass was wheeled out to take a bow in prime time just before John Edwards's vice presidential acceptance speech. Almost every speaker emphasized the Democrats' determination to fight the war on terror more effectively than President Bush. And of course, the story of John Kerry's own personal heroism in Vietnam, repeated endlessly through the week, was intended to convey the promise of strong, decisive leadership.

The platform, of course, is read only by a few fanatics and curious journalists. But, haggled over as it is by party strategists, it is a helpful guide to what the leadership thinks will sustain a presidential election campaign.

And it shows that, despite the deep unpopularity of the Iraq war among Democrats, the party's leadership is still unwilling to reject President Bush's decision to remove Saddam Hussein.

A *Boston Globe* poll this week indicated that 95 percent of the delegates who came to the convention believe the war was a mistake. But the closest the party leadership could get to their position was the following:

"People of good will disagree about whether America should have gone to war in Iraq."

Instead of rejecting head-on the Bush team's post-September 11 strategy, the Kerry-Edwards approach

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seems to be: We could have done all these things without alienating our allies and upsetting the world.

But here's the trouble. How do they think an administration determined to prosecute the war in Iraq, to defend firmly Israel's right to its own security, and to ignore many of the international treaties much of the world holds sacred, could achieve its goals without alienating some old allies?

Certainly no one would say the Bush administration's diplomacy in the last four years has been of the highest quality. But no amount of sugar-coating could have sold these policies to America's allies without producing stresses in its global relations.

Instead, the Democrats' approach seems to assume that, with a kind word and a charming smile, all the objections that European and Arab states have had to the same policies the Democrats seem willing to execute can be just waved away.

Typical of this approach is the wonderfully blithe assertion in the platform that, in order to better secure the peace in Iraq, "we must convince NATO to take on a more significant role." This confidence flies in the face of the political realities in Europe, where NATO members are neither willing nor able to provide much support for the United States.

Of course a cynical view might be that what happens at the party's convention and what goes into the platform tells us more about where the Democrats' leaders think their electoral interests lie than what they might actually do in office. In this view, a list of policies carefully crafted for public consumption is not the best guide to a party's real intentions in government, for which we need to look at the voting and rhetorical record of its presidential candidate over 20 years in public office. Indeed, that record would at least explain why a Democratic party now animated by a boiling hatred of President Bush's foreign policies seems so willing to emulate them. ♦

But Enough About My Husband . . .

Teresa Heinz Kerry, the morning after.

BY JONATHAN V. LAST

Boston

WITH THE EXCEPTION of Jimmy Carter, Teresa Heinz Kerry probably got the worst reviews of any prime-time speaker at the Democratic convention. Will Saletan of *Slate* criticized her for talking about her late husband John Heinz, the Republican senator from Pennsylvania. Andrew Sullivan called her speech "condescending, unnecessary, and pointless." Off-the-record comments were even more devastating. And who can blame reporters for mocking a speech that featured lines like this: "With John Kerry as president, global climate change and other threats to the health of our planet will begin to be reversed"?

Journalists weren't the only ones who noticed. Twenty-four hours later, both Elizabeth and John Edwards seemed to be sucking up to the boss's wife, ostentatiously inserting testimonials to Teresa into their own convention speeches. "I am honored to stand with her," Elizabeth Edwards said at the top of her remarks. "By the way, how great was Teresa Heinz Kerry last night?" John Edwards asked, apropos of nothing.

Still, anyone who's covered Teresa knows that her convention performance was savvy and disciplined, by her standards. Not only did she use prepared remarks—she actually spent part of her speech *talking about John Kerry*.

But by the following morning, she was back to normal. Her first stop was the Hispanic Caucus, at the downtown Sheraton. She arrived to an enthusiastic ovation and spoke, as she almost always does, quite extemporaneously.

With her soft voice and Audrey Hepburn-like caressing of her words, she began by noting that she's "about seven-eighths Latin." Yet for some reason, she said, "recently, a columnist chided me that I wasn't really an immigrant."

Teresa takes some offense at this notion, and talked about how difficult her life was when she came to America, leaving behind her beloved Mozambique. The idea that someone can't appreciate the immigrant experience just because they happen to be a billionaire, she said, is "tommyrot."

She then went on to explain how she was recently thinking about Cuban Americans and why they tend to vote Republican. It turns out that she identifies with them, and understands what they must feel, since it hurt her deeply when Mozambique fell to the Marxists. "I still feel that way about my country," she said.

She asked if there were any Brazilians in the audience. One woman stood up and cheered. She and Teresa shared a few words in Portuguese. Then Teresa mentioned her late husband and their three children and one grandchild, and talked about how important family is to her. After 11 minutes, she wrapped up, having made not a single reference to John Kerry.

Teresa was then whisked across the hallway to a ballroom to address a combined audience of the African-American and Veterans Caucuses. Not wanting to leave either group out, she

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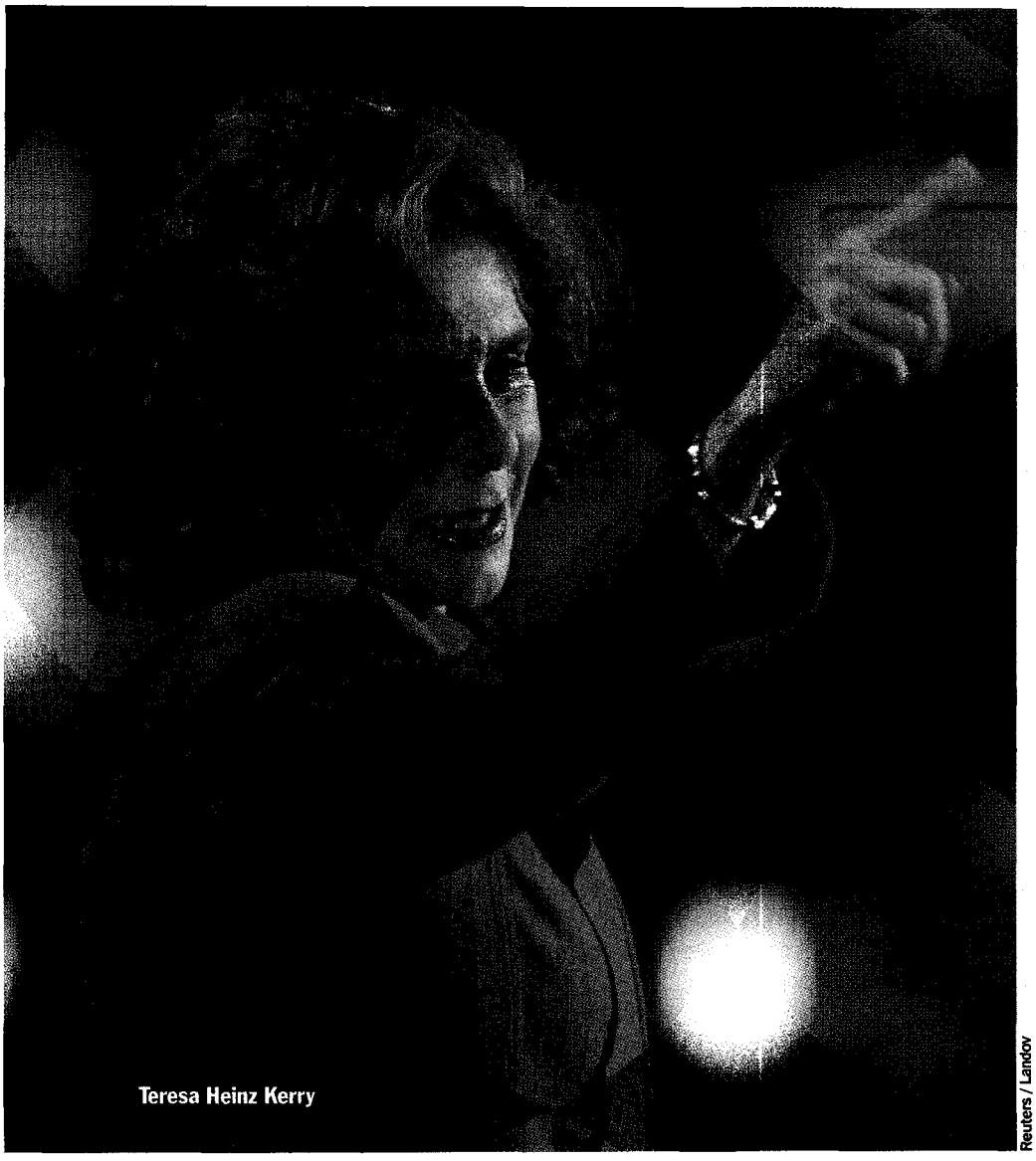

Teresa Heinz Kerry

Reuters / Landov

started off by talking about equal pay for women. Then, she segued into the importance of early-childhood intervention to keep kids in school.

Unlike most political speakers, Teresa Heinz Kerry rarely repeats herself. She doesn't have a stump speech—or, for that matter, any set speeches. The only subject she's guilty of recycling is the story of her childhood in Africa. She's always telling audiences about how she was born and raised in Africa, and how her father, who was a doctor, used to take her out into the bush on weekends. It's always a little disappointing when she tells her "growing up African" story—it's the only time a Teresa speech feels like a performance and not simply the broadcasting of her interior monologue.

But she's never stuck there for long. The African Americans and veterans get the "growing up African" story, but sure enough, less than a minute into it, Teresa veered to a more interesting topic: medieval Portuguese poetry. "In the 15th century, when the Portuguese were making stops in Africa on the way to India," she cooed, the African people gave inspiration to "the most famous epic poet Luís de Camões, who wrote *The Lusiads*." After quoting a passage from *The Lusiads*, Teresa told the crowd how she marched against apartheid as a young girl, but never told her mother about it.

Even as a lass, she knew that the fight against apartheid was important, and she promised, "In John, and John Edwards, and Elizabeth, and in me, you will have strong, soft, persuasive stands, with you all the way." It's her first mention of Kerry since the night before.

Not wanting to dwell on the Democratic presidential candidate, Teresa moved on, until Max Cleland entered the room and was wheeled onstage. She stopped in the middle of her remarks and winked to the crowd, "I have to give him a kiss." And she did.

No other woman running for first lady could get away with being as impossibly sweet and flirtatious as Teresa Heinz Kerry is.

Her next stop was at the Gay, Lesbian, Bi-Sexual, and Transgender Caucus, where the woman introducing her asked the assemblage, "Did she not look *really hot* last night?" The audience responded with an enthusiastic and husky "*Yeah!*" They were still cheering when Teresa got up to the microphone. Caught a little off her guard, she looked down and giggled.

She spent the first half of her remarks "on topic," talking about gay rights. She said that if her son came home to tell her he was gay, had met a wonderful man, and wanted to get married, she would hope that she could share her joy with all of her friends and family, no matter what their cultural or religious differences.

She then recounted a story from a campaign fundraiser in Sonoma. A

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man in the audience "put his hands up," Teresa remembered, "and he said, 'I'd like you to be my mother.'"

The GLBT crowd laughed, but Teresa wasn't telling the story as a goof: "It was a sad statement," she said, because it told her that he hadn't been able to make peace with his mother. "So I told him, 'At least, if nothing else, you'll have a mom in the White House who loves you. You can call me Mama T any time.'"

It was an odd moment, the elegant, Swiss-educated heiress not looking much like a "Mama T." But it was neither as odd—nor as revealing—as when she told the group, "If I have one quality that I can brag about, because it's just who I am, it's that I like to nurture people, I like to enable." After closing her remarks, she was done campaigning for the day. She had mentioned her husband once all morning.

It's easy to see why Teresa Heinz Kerry bothers some people: She's part Arianna Huffington, part Zsa Zsa Gabor, and part Ginger from *Gilligan's Island*. But in many ways, she's a ray of sunshine in a tough and unpleasant campaign. Teresa is intelligent and charming, to be sure. But she's also both honest *and* candid—a little like John McCain. If he were attractive, a bit dotty, and filthy rich.

Her candor can be incredibly touching. "When I was 5 years old, or 6, I had just had a little baby sister, so I was really enchanted," she told the GLBT caucus during one of her digressions. "And people would say, 'Well, what are you going to be when you are big?' And I always said, 'I'm going to have 12 children.'" Here the audience broke out in laughter, but it was not a joke.

"I didn't," Teresa continued. "I tried, but I didn't." Not understanding what she meant, the audience laughed again, and started clapping.

Teresa paused for just a moment. "I lost three, okay? So I got up to six," she said gently. "But I have three wonderful children, and a grandchild." Her voice had real pain, and pride. ♦

Just Another Pretty Face

The charming mayor of charm city.

BY RACHEL DICARLO

Martin O'Malley

Gary Hershorn / Reuters

Boston

SEVERAL WOMEN sitting with the Maryland delegation actually giggle when Baltimore mayor Martin O'Malley takes the stage to deliver his pre-prime-time speech at the Fleet Center on Wednesday. As he takes his turn reciting the convention mantra about building a stronger America, O'Malley is visibly nervous. His hand shakes when he sips his water, and he gestures awkwardly. But his fans are undeterred. "Who do you think is better looking," one woman asks another, "him or John Edwards?"

Some two dozen members of the Maryland Democratic party have turned out in green and white O'Malley T-shirts to watch the mayor, and not all of them are female. "We're so proud of Martin," one man tells me.

There's no doubt O'Malley is appealing. His charm is likened to that of a Kennedy. He's fiery, young, and handsome, with strong, symmetrical features and thick brown hair. An Irish-Catholic with a pretty wife and a gaggle of cute kids, he's even the frontman for a Celtic rock band called O'Malley's March.

O'Malley was a supporter of Howard Dean until he belatedly endorsed John Kerry in February. He's been a leader among the mayors in calling for increased federal funds for homeland security, which "makes him the perfect speaker on Wednesday to represent John Kerry's vision of a stronger, more secure America," says Lina Garcia, press secretary for the convention.

Rachel DiCarlo is an editorial assistant at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

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Five years ago, O'Malley was a little noted Baltimore city councilman. Running for mayor in 1999, he talked heatedly about zero tolerance for crime, the need to clean up Baltimore's rotten public schools, and an end to its status as the most drug-addicted city in America and the nation's murder capital. He won, with 91 percent of the vote.

Since then, change has been slow. O'Malley cleaned up the city's bureaucracy by pushing through privatization and higher accountability. But white flight persists. The murder rate remains among the highest in the nation, and the police commissioner O'Malley brought down from New York to turn things around started a six-month prison sentence in July for misusing funds. His successor has been accused of domestic violence.

O'Malley has increased funding for drug treatment and education, but schools are in about the same lousy shape as before; their latest black eye is the disappearance of $58 million from education coffers. And that's only the beginning of the budget woes. O'Malley recently proposed $45 million in new taxes, including a cell phone tax, to help fill the city's starving treasury.

O'Malley can't be faulted for all of Baltimore's problems, but they are fair game in an election. What's more, he is now seen in some quarters as a loose cannon. In one famous episode, the mayor drove to a radio station to confront a talk show host and his guest after hearing them criticize him on the air. He invited them to come outside after the show, "and I'll kick your ass."

He's also angered two major political players who should be his allies. Trial lawyer Peter Angelos, one of the most powerful private citizens in the state because of the number and size of the checks he writes for Democratic causes, dismissed O'Malley in July as "nothing more than a small-time politician aspiring to high political office." Angelos, owner of the Baltimore Orioles, was set off by O'Malley's flippant admission that he wouldn't oppose the relocation of the Montreal Expos to nearby Washington, D.C.

O'Malley also irritated state comptroller William Donald Schaefer, a colorful curmudgeon and a popular former Baltimore mayor and governor of Maryland, when O'Malley said at a Kerry fundraiser that he was more worried about a second Bush term than he was about al Qaeda. The comment made national news and prompted Schaefer to accuse O'Malley of treason. Schaefer, 82, may be getting outlandish as he ages, but his influence in elections shouldn't be underestimated. Just ask Maryland governor Bob Ehrlich, a Schaefer ally and the state's first Republican governor in almost four decades.

O'Malley is the obvious choice to run against Ehrlich in 2006, and he hasn't quashed speculation that he'll make the race. He took one for the Democratic team last time around, when he made "the most difficult political decision of my life" and stepped aside for former lieutenant governor Kathleen Kennedy Townsend to run in 2002.

"O'Malley's magnetic and articulate. He's also a lightning rod," says Maryland pollster Keith Haller. But the buzz about his prospects isn't limited to Maryland. The national media love him. *Esquire* called him the "best young mayor in America" in a lengthy cover story in 2002, and Senate minority leader Tom Daschle calls him "a rising star." For all that, Kerry doesn't owe O'Malley anything. For the time being, he's a Democrat to watch on the state, not the national, scene. ♦

Amateur Hour at the Fleet Center

What happened when the cameras weren't on.

BY KATHERINE MANGU-WARD

Boston

AT 4:15 ON MONDAY, July 26, Miss Teen New Mexico takes the stage at the Democratic convention to belt out a stirring rendition of the national anthem to the nearly empty Fleet Center. What it stirs, mainly, is a sense of dread. Looking for my niche in the teeming journalistic ecosystem, I've settled on the quaint concept of ditching the receptions and covering the convention—the parts you don't see on TV. The sessions are gaveled to order each day at 4:00 P.M., and there are hours of events before prime-time coverage begins. Happily, there are almost no other reporters around. Horrifyingly, the festivities quickly reveal themselves to be a hideous hybrid of StarSearch and C-SPAN.

Katherine Mangu-Ward is a reporter at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

An endless parade of female/minority/swing-state candidates and officeholders step up for their three minutes at the podium. They announce their name, rank, serial number, and why they love John Kerry. Then a giant hook pulls them offstage. Reasons for their devotion to Kerry range from "He's going to make America strong at home and respected abroad" to "We can trust John Kerry with our nation's future."

To entertain myself, I start a tally of the speakers who refer to "the Kerry presidency" in the present tense. But somewhere around 30 I lose count—and interest. There's a reason for the mind-numbingly dull speeches from the Democratic farm team. The Kerry campaign wants it that way. Even reliably spunky Democrats like Senator Mary Landrieu of Louisiana and Jesse Jacksons senior and junior seem muted, leading me to suspect that the

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DNC is handing out Xanax backstage to calm potential troublemakers.

After a fruitless quest to secure a dose for myself, I return to my seat in time for one of the many musical interludes scheduled to break up the monotonous chatter. Over the course of three days, the delegates will be treated to not one, but two performances of "Yankee Doodle Dandy." The first is by Boston bagpipers, the second, a mere 24 hours later, from the Middlesex County 4-H fife and drum corps. In between, a pit orchestra wails out convention classics like "Everyday People," "Dancin' in the Street," and "We Are Family." The delegates who have arrived early get down and get funky. The arrhythmic arm wave is much in evidence, as is the white man's overbite. Diversity onstage notwithstanding, the delegates are uniformly bad dancers. There is an inverse correlation between the number of sequins, feathers, and stuffed donkeys on the hat of any delegate and his ability to clap on the beat.

At the desk next to me in the "writing press" section of the arena, a salt-and-pepper-haired reporter from *U.S. News & World Report* is also getting his groove on. His groove consists largely of the rhythmic tapping of his pen. But he is on the beat at least, and has also clearly drawn the convention-coverage short straw. I decide a little pen-dancing is forgivable and indulge myself.

H.L. Mencken, I think, was only half right in his famous observation about political conventions: "One sits through long sessions, wishing heartily that all the delegates and alternates were dead and in hell—and then suddenly there comes a show so gaudy and hilarious, so melodramatic and obscene, so unimaginably exhilarating and preposterous that one lives a gorgeous year in an hour."

I'm still waiting for that "gorgeous year" feeling to kick in sometime during day three, when I notice that the sheep-like tendencies of the delegates have reached new lows. They have failed to comprehend that if one is not, say, a firefighter, then enthusiastically waving a poster that reads "Firefighters for Kerry" is somewhat disingenuous. But the delegates cheerfully advertise their membership in any number of interest groups in the space of an hour by waving anything they are handed. They brandish and then toss aside the generic "Kerry-Edwards 2004" poster in order to take up "Pro-Kerry. Pro-Edwards. Pro-Choice" banners, which they then exchange for yellow T-shirts and placards from the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF). They pull off the T-shirts in time to grab "Teamsters for Kerry" posters. Multiply all the wardrobe changes by 12 hours, and you'll begin to sympathize with Mencken's plea for delegate damnation.

But posters and T-shirts aren't the only freebies being handed out. Just as the delegates are struggling to pull the firefighter shirts over their heads without mussing their "Kerry '04" face paint, a friendly girl with a ponytail comes by and hands me a jar of salsa. It's not just any salsa—it's "Governor Bill Richardson's New Mexico Salsa," and it bears his likeness on the label. I begin to wish heartily for a massive delegate food fight to break out.

But the delegates' attention is elsewhere. They are transfixed by a deeply bizarre video playing on the enormous monitors behind the podium. Clips of firemen fighting raging blazes are interspersed with shots of IAFF members happily waving Kerry-Edwards signs and cheering. A perky musical soundtrack accompanies the video. No one seems quite sure whether they should be pumped up, or sobered by the challenges our nation faces. They opt for polite applause as IAFF president Harold Schaitberger takes the stage.

The delegates, to their credit, grow ever more inattentive to the amateur hour speakers as the week progresses. They mill around chatting and taking pictures of each other's growing collection of anti-Bush buttons and pins. By Wednesday, they rouse themselves to cheer only on rare occasions. When the name of their own state is mentioned from the podium, most delegations manage at least a feeble hurrah. The exception is New York, whose delegates are apparently too cool to show up before 9:00 P.M.—ever.

The only other way for the B-team at the podium to get a reaction is to say something particularly outrageous about the president. Mayor Donald Plusquellic of Akron, Ohio, for example, asks the delegates to "think about it, our kids are being driven in school buses over bridges that are in danger of collapsing." It's unclear why this would be Bush's fault, but the delegates give Plusquellic their best "we-hate-Bush" cheer.

In a similar vein, nearly every African-American speaker over the course of three days utters some version of the line: "Every vote counts and every vote must be counted." This means at least a dozen daily uses of the line. No one quite comes out and says, "Republicans are racists who rig elections," but the message is clear, and the delegates cheer mightily.

And then there is the glorious moment, at around 6:00 P.M. on Wednesday, when amateur hour at last achieves the exalted Menckenian heights of self-parody. David Paterson, New York state senate minority leader, is trotted out to the podium. He is from Harlem, he is black, and—wait for it—he is blind. He is the personification of the minority constituency trifecta, and the crowd loves him. "I've been waiting for this moment for 40 years," he says. And then he tells us that he has "a vision for New York state." Seriously.

After the raucous round of applause for Paterson, my spirit is broken. I don't even have the oomph left to pay attention to Dennis Kucinich, who is scheduled for 7:45, right before the 8:00 cutoff, when the amateurs finally cede the stage.

As I stagger out of the Fleet Center, clutching my laptop and my jar of salsa, I breathe in the cool evening air, thankful to be free. But then an icy fear grips my heart. The Republican amateur hour is only four weeks away, and someone will have to be there to bear witness. ♦

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Happy Campers in Boston

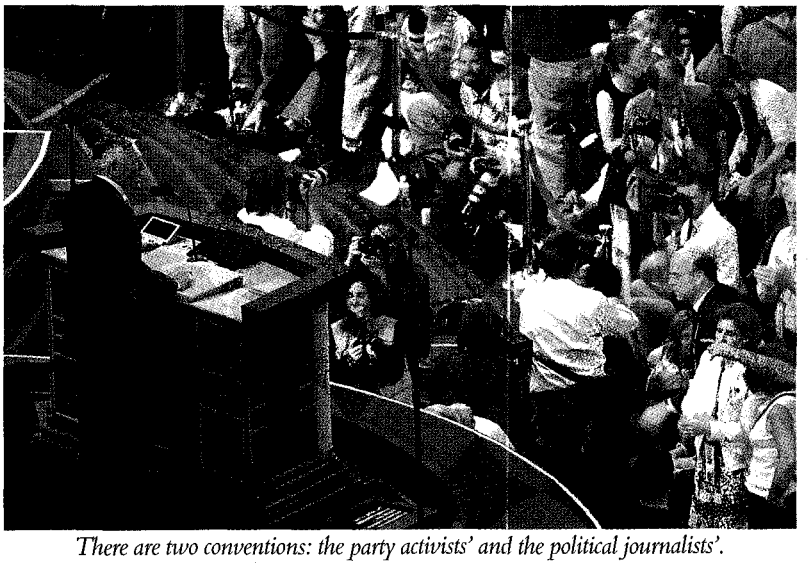
At last, the parasites have consumed their host.

By Andrew Ferguson

Arlington, Virginia

Every four years, one thinks: Now they've done it, they've gone too far, this will be the last one, it has to stop now, they can't go on like this a moment longer. And every four years, one is wrong. They do go on. They will make it happen again in New York City four weeks from now, and then again four years from now, and eight. They go on not because they have to but because they want to. They go on because this is all for them—for, by, and about journalists.

Complaining about the empty ritual of the press complaining about the "empty rituals" that conventions have become has now become, if you'll pardon the expression, an empty ritual—and soon enough complaints about complaining about the complaints will be declared an empty ritual, and so on and so on, in the endless refractions that carom through punditry's postmodern house of mirrors, where all commentary is about other commentary. The disdain that political journalists express for modern party conventions (not only "empty ritual" but "staged," "choreographed," "infomercial," and all the other seething pejoratives) is matched only by the intensity with which they insist on covering them. Every national political reporter knows the drill. He will sniff at how "substance free" the conventions are, he will roll his eyes at the inflated claims of party publicists, and then he will mow down his grandmother if she stands between him and the chance to get a good hotel room adjacent to the convention center.



There are two conventions: the party activists' and the political journalists'.

In 2004 the traditional chorus of complaints has swelled with a fresh set of high, piping voices. These were the bloggers, nearly a hundred of them, or so I heard, who were granted press credentials and workstations and who arrived in Boston and set to work with the earnest, insouciant enthusiasm of the hobbyist, which is their chief charm. From what I've gathered over the last few years, clicking randomly from one blog to another, it is the job of a blogger to record his every neural discharge, faithfully and minutely, leaving no thought unpublished, no matter how uninteresting. Bloggers think and think and think and scribble and scribble and scribble, and yet at the Democratic National Convention, perhaps for the first time in their lives, they found themselves in a situation where, by general acclamation, there was nothing to think about! They were not deterred for long, needless to say. They started to think about why there was nothing to think about,

Andrew Ferguson is a senior editor at The Weekly Standard.

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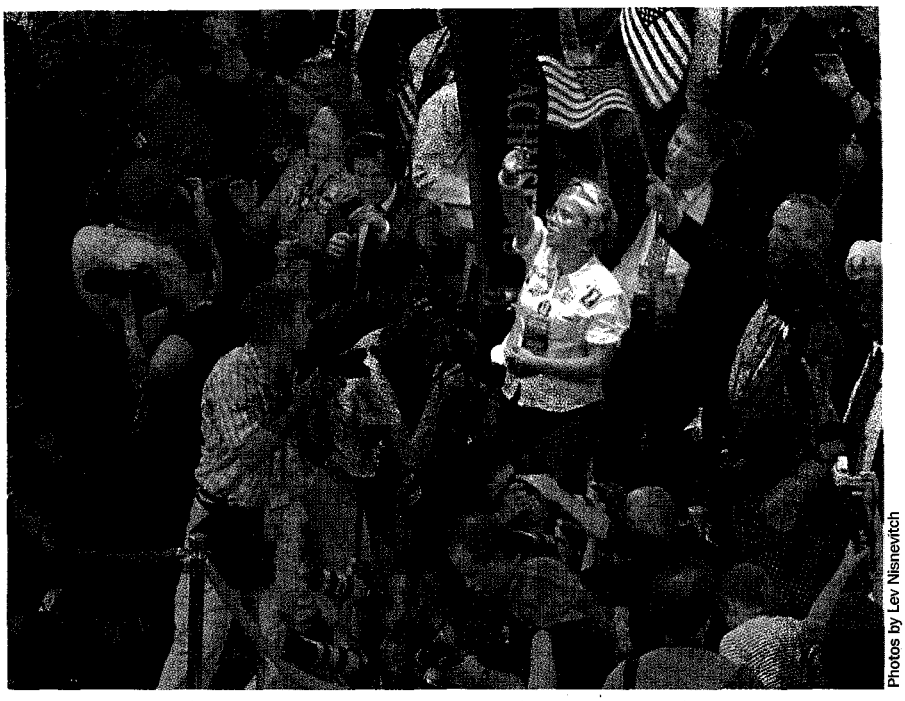

Photos by Lev Nisnevitch

The journalists' convention grows ever larger and more robust.

and that was all they needed. They were off. Graphomania reclaimed its throne. The websites suddenly bristled with copy. It was a nice representation, in miniature, of the phases that mainstream political journalism has gone through over the last two generations, as conventions deliquesced from robust tribal gatherings to hollow "Up With People"-style stage shows, swarming with an ever larger host of reporters who've come to write about how little there is to write about.

Yet I noticed something curious in the convention blogs, during those jam-packed few hours before I stopped reading them altogether. If there was a common thread running through them it was a casual mention by the blogger of being interviewed by mainstream journalists. "This was by far the nicest interview I've done so far," wrote one blogger—on Monday morning, before the convention had even begun. The journalists, of course, were writing stories about the new presence of bloggers at the convention. "Convention Bloggers Feel Their Way," wrote the Associated Press. "Web Loggers Get Their Credentials," said the *Baltimore Sun*. "At the DNC, It's a Blog-eat-blog World," said the *Christian Science Monitor*, unappetizingly. "Blogs Give Unedited Convention View," said the *Kansas City Star*. And as these convention-blogger stories piled up in the establishment press—there were several dozens of them by midweek—the real purpose of inviting bloggers to the convention suddenly became clear: They were there to be interviewed. Huddled together in the Fleet Center, conveniently herded into their own seating section, thinking and tapping away, they served the larger goal of giving mainstream journalists a story.

This too was a nice representation, in miniature, of some larger phenomenon. I'm not the first to have noticed that nowadays, when a political party convenes for its quadrennial gathering, there are actually two conventions going on: the traditional convention of perhaps 4,000 party activists and a much larger convention of 15,000 political journalists. Both conventions fulfill the customary social and business functions of such gatherings, as surely as a meeting of the Shriners would, or the annual convention of the Direct Marketing Association: The participants hang out, gossip, drink, spend expense-account money, "make contacts," do a little work, eat better food than they would at home, skulk through the occasional illicit sexual liaison, and gather scraps of information that may later prove useful.

This tale-of-two-conventions is now commonly recognized. What is less often noted, though it becomes increasingly obvious, is that as the party conventions grow wan and meaningless, drained of all surprise and news value and practical importance, they have been kept alive by the second convention, the journalists' convention, which in contrast grows larger, more elaborate, and more robust every four years. The parasite has consumed the host. A national political convention is now an extension, an outgrowth, of something much more consequential and, from the journalistic point of view, necessary: The political conventions exist for the journalists who cover them. It gives us a chance to hang out—a professional reason-to-be, something to do.

I'd be tempted to say that journalists have hijacked the American political process, except the phrase makes the thing sound too sinister; who else, after all, would care enough about the American political process to hijack it? But journalists do now determine its pace, the shape of its narrative, its climaxes and longueurs—everything but its final outcome, which, like a last redoubt, has been left in the hands of voters. The process itself now proceeds, as it were, at the pleasure of the journalistic class. I first noticed this strange tail-wagging-the-dog development in 1999, when a previously unnoticed event called the Ames (Iowa) straw poll

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unexpectedly, after twenty years of insignificance, assumed cataclysmic importance in the race for the Republican presidential nomination.

The straw poll was conceived as a fundraiser for the state Republican party, and it ran concurrently with the Iowa state fair, a colorful spectacle that, in the daily experience of a typical national political reporter, is as exotic as a circumcision rite in Borneo. This fact alone made the straw poll an enjoyable story to cover, but more important, the event fell at a point in the election cycle—months before the Iowa caucuses and New Hampshire primary—when reporters and pundits were growing cranky and impatient. Political journalists require constant stimulation. Nothing much had happened, politically, for what seemed like an eternity. The corporate AmEx cards were burning a hole in our pockets. Millions of Frequent Flyer miles were languishing, unused. We were lonely. We missed one another. So we made something happen.

Delegates are wildly outnumbered by media.

Suddenly it was understood that, as a matter of "expectations" and "conventional wisdom," the Ames straw poll was "make or break" for several Republican candidates, including such party stalwarts as Dan Quayle and Lamar Alexander. Six hundred reporters and pundits descended on Ames like a cloud of yellow jackets. It was a blast. Everybody got to be together again. The restaurants in Ames are terrible, of course, but it's not like we were paying for it ourselves. "It's like going back to summer camp," one pundit said.

And such happy campers! It's important to remember that, since its beginning in 1979, the straw poll had been nothing but a lark, a summer diversion for local Republicans who, while they were at it, might raise a few dollars for the party. It had no intrinsic significance. Its results carried no official weight. No delegates to the nominating convention were selected. As a measure of opinion among Iowa Republicans, the straw poll's sample was too small to be reliable. What significance it came to possess had simply been bestowed by journalists who had gotten sick of sitting at home.

And yet—well, I'll be damned—it turned out all the reporters and pundits were right! The Ames straw poll was important after all! Under the brilliant Midwestern sun, with the stink of manure rolling in from the fairgrounds and from the alfalfa fields beyond, all 25,000 votes were cast and tabulated (there are half a million Republicans in Iowa), and the reporters combed through the results before delivering the verdict. And the verdict was grim. Those candidates who had been declared endangered, who had to do well in order to, um, do well, failed to meet "expectations." As a result, soon after the straw poll, Quayle and Alexander dropped out of the race for president; the course of the campaign had been altered irretrievably. The journalists had cud to chew over for months. Then it was time for the caucuses.

It's not hard to understand how we got here, how politics became a slave to the tyranny of journalism. Conventions, primary debates, straw polls—no matter how ridiculous as objective events, they offer solace in what can be a lonely life. Unlike, say, Irish step-dancers or amateur chefs, reporters and pundits who cover politics have built their lives around an interest that almost nobody else shares. The indifference Americans feel for politics deepens every day, further driving the political journalists back on their own resources. It was only natural that in time we would seek out one another's company, and delight in it, and grow dependent on it, and eventually, as now, create opportunities to indulge it where none existed before. So the conventions will go on and on, long after their usefulness has been exhausted.

Indeed, their lack of objective significance is quite beside the point. Last week, when you watched the network or cable coverage, the trend became plain. Instead of the convention, what you saw was the same people saying the same things they'd been saying all year, in Manchester and Des Moines and Columbia, South Carolina, talking and explaining to the audience the ramifications of what they weren't showing you. Settled before the camera, or gathered in the press tent, these happy campers could have been anywhere. It doesn't really matter—just so long as they're together. ♦

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Getting Out the Phat Vote

The Hip-Hop Summit and the Nu America

By Matt Labash

Boston

Consider the poor, maltreated vote. During simpler times, it was merely cast, then counted. But these days, that's no longer good enough. A profusion of voter-registration organizations now scold us in their 501(c)3, purportedly nonpartisan way that we need to "Rock the Vote," "Dunk the Vote," or even, in the case of pro wrestling fans, "Smackdown the Vote." It is enough to make you pine for the healing balm of apathy. And it is no doubt only a matter of time before someone Garrotes or Defenestrates or Disembowels the Vote.

But of all of these, the most curious are those who insist on Rapping the Vote. For politics and hip-hop go together like chocolate and anchovies, or like Dennis Kucinich and Tupac Shakur, the former of whom has cited the latter as being his favorite rap artist. Even though he couldn't name any of his songs, Kucinich claimed he admired the late Mr. Shakur's thug-life ethos, saying he had "an elegant dissatisfaction with the situation."

"It's corny," says Darius Mitchell, and Darius should know. He is a towering black man and hip-hop head who edits an online newsletter, *masspoliticalnews.com*, which sub-specializes in policing the intersection between political and hip-hop cultures. Mercifully, it's not a very busy intersection. Until now, the second day of the Democratic Convention, or rather the day of the Hip-Hop Summit, which for Darius is sort of like Christmas and Mardi Gras and Oscar night all rolled into one.

At the Reggie Lewis Athletic Center at Roxbury Community College, I make his acquaintance in a backstage bullpen, where we are waiting to secure interviews with the talent. Though I like to keep up with what the kids are listening to, I can only recognize a small percentage of the photos on the program. So I turn to Darius for guidance.

Matt Labash is a senior writer at The Weekly Standard.

Remy Martin is on the list. I joke to Darius that I know him, he makes a fine cognac. "She," he corrects. "That guy is Lloyd Banks," he says, "his single right now is on fire." "It's pretty, hot, huh?" I counter, trying to speak the language. "No, no," he says with a pitying glance, "That's the name of the single—'On Fire.'" "Oh," I say, feeling as though my press pass should read "Whitey W. Whitebread."

"There's Jadakiss," he says, pointing out the rapper who recently suggested in rhyme that George W. Bush felled the World Trade Center. "What about this Benzino fella?" I ask Darius. A look of concern crosses his face. "I hope he's not here," he says, "because him and Jadakiss don't get along. Benzino's crew got stabbed-up a while back." That would be bad, I agree, though I'm secretly pleased, since the Democratic convention has been on the dull side, and it is highly improbable that anyone's crew will get stabbed-up at the National Conference of Democratic Mayors luncheon.

Founded in 2001 by Russell Simmons and former NAACP director Benjamin Chavis, the Hip-Hop Summit Action Network, if you want to get as wordy about their mission as their promotional literature does, "is dedicated to harnessing the cultural relevance of hip-hop music to serve as a catalyst for education advocacy and other societal concerns fundamental to the well-being of at-risk youth throughout the United States." Which is to say, they set up conferences across the country where rappers get to pop off about politics, all in the hopes of turning out 2 million additional young voters in this election, under the prom theme, "Taking Back Responsibility."

Reporters are herded into a hallway where we fall on the musicians. I make a beeline for Babs, a diminutive female rapper with a straight-razor delivery. Babs was most recently a star of the MTV reality show *Making the Band*, in which impresario Sean "Puffy" Combs put together a murderer's row of unknown rappers in the hope of making them into a super-group called "Da Band." When they proved stubbornly whiny, incessantly fought with each

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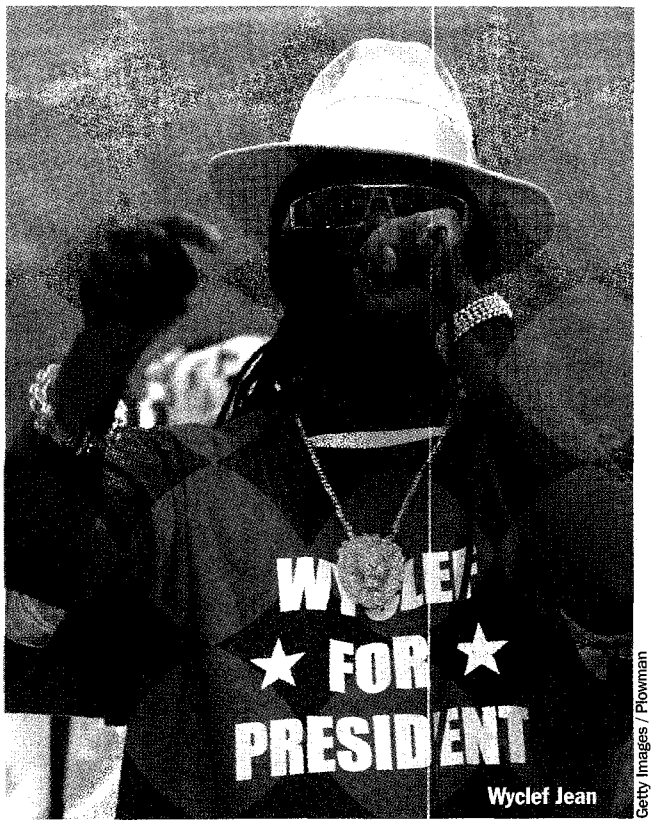
other, and failed to show up for gigs, Puffy, in keeping with today's theme, had to take responsibility back, putting the kibosh on the whole project.

I ask Babs if Puffy's had any second thoughts. "Da Band is a wrap," she says with finality. Still, even without job security, she felt she had to be here since "it's a big thing—it's more for the kids." I don't take Babs for a current-events buff, but she has seen Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11*. "Woowwwww!!!" is her reaction to it. I ask her what she holds Bush responsible for. "Everything," she replies, "The war, the World Trade Center, just everything." Was he complicit in the Twin Towers going down? "I think he had a part in it," she says. "There was a lot of people that was involved, but he knew it was going to happen."

With people like Babs in charge of voter education, one could deduce that the voters are in trouble. Indeed, anyone who reads the Hip-Hop Summit's "National Agenda: What We Want" might be left thinking these political strategists are amateurs. In addition to demands for reparations, an end to three-strikes drug laws, and the "progressive transformation" of society into a "Nu America," presumably one that spells phonetically, they also advance pragmatic objectives such as "the total elimination of racism . . . hatred and bigotry" and "the total elimination of poverty."



Wyclef Jean

Getty Images / Plowman

Spying organizer Russell Simmons pinned against a soda machine in the cramped hallway, I ask him if he isn't being a tad naive. "Keep your vision on something that's high. Do your best, then go to sleep," he says defensively. "I don't eat animals, but I wear leather shoes. You know, I do my best. The elimination of poverty—that's what we want." And I want Penelope Cruz to give me nightly backrubs while she tells me in English and Spanish that I am a godlike man, but I don't put that in my promotional literature and pretend it's going to happen.

Simmons has made hundreds of millions not only by starting pioneer rap label Def Jam in the 1980s, but by pretty much cornering the phat/def-centric market. He has branched out into everything from television comedy (HBO's "Def Comedy Jam") to books (*Life and Def* is his biography) to fashion lines (Phat Farm, Baby Phat, Phat Farm Boys, and Baby Phat Girlz). Still, in Simmons's thinking, the custodians of hip-hop culture also need to weigh in on matters of national importance, and to use their influence to get people to vote. "It's the right thing to do," says Simmons. "People respect Puffy more than they do George Bush. That's for sure. Certainly worldwide, you can't argue that."

Not that he's endorsing John Kerry. Simmons's brother—Reverend Run, of Run DMC fame, who has found religion and who now wears a clerical collar along with his trademark fedora—stands beside him. Ever mindful of the legalities prohibiting nonprofits from endorsing specific candidates, Run struggles not to laugh when Simmons says he can't comment on who the hip-hop generation's going to vote for. "We're a nonpartisan organization," Run says.

Over in another corner, Puffy's protégé and former Jeeves, Farnsworth Bentley, stands immaculately tailored in a bold-stripe suit, his captoed kicks shining like lightbulbs, and an umbrella—from his new line—hooked over his arm. Bentley likens the voter-registration seeds being planted to his own umbrella entrepreneurship. "They're not going to understand until they see the umbrella fly out, like okay, this is serious. This man really started something. He made using umbrellas indoors a not-bad look." Not voting, he says, is exhibiting bad taste, "like walking around without a pocket square." But he won't say who he'll vote for. He's waiting for the debates—"I want to hear people talking smart."

In another corner, Wyclef Jean—the man who gained political renown when Howard Dean named "Jaspora" his favorite song—seems to have a pick for president: himself. Wyclef wears a "Wyclef for President" T-shirt, which nicely complements his new single, "If I Was President." No warm-up city council or alderman gigs for him; Wyclef's ready for the top job. He holds forth on how he'd make a

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decent president of Haiti, and how he hopes to meet with Kofi Annan to talk over problems in his homeland. A reporter riles Wyclef, asking if it isn't hypocritical that voter-registration cheerleaders like Simmons have admitted skipping plenty of elections themselves ("Well he's going to vote this year," offers Wyclef). But as he defends Simmons, I'm distracted by his diamond-encrusted lion's-head pendant. It's as big as a trailer hitch. I ask him what it means. "It means I'll eat yo' ass up," he clarifies.

In an indoor track arena filled with about 4,000 people, the summit begins. First up are day-glo bedecked dancers who groove like banshees to a sound-system-shattering megamix, not on the stage, but right on the floor amidst the chairs. Hundreds flee their seats, pressing around to get a better view. It feels like the makings of a British football riot. As I'm nearly stampeded, I flash to how tough a time my minister will have eulogizing me with a straight face, as he tells how I was cut down before my time while taking notes on a hip-hop dance troupe.

Next up is a local spoken-word artist who makes an oddball selection, speak-singing his own "Losing Hip-Hop." He really does seem to be interested in taking back responsibility, blaming the rap world for promoting everything from unfettered materialism to licentiousness to violence. As he goes on, it seems as if he might have the wrong arena. This mostly young crowd hadn't come to hear how their idols were debauched hooligans. They'd come to see the Ying Yang Twins.

As the various hip-hoppers are introduced to maddening cheers, moderator Benjamin Chavis starts off with a tough one, asking each person to explain how they got where they are, to reveal their secrets of success. Farnsworth Bentley says, "First of all, I have to say, you have to vote for yourselves, ladies and gentlemen. I'm gonna keep it all the way real with you, all right?" Wyclef follows suit, saying, "The most important thing in life is to believe in yourself."

Downwind in the echo chamber, Simmons opines that the audience needs to "put God first." A few seconds later, he contradicts himself, saying "put yourself first" (a first-place tie presumably goes to God). Rapper Loon splits the difference, saying, "that's the most important thing in the world, knowing God and knowing yourself." Displaying the kind of original thinking that's become synonymous with the Hip-Hop Summit, BET's Big Tigga states, "I agree with what everybody before me said." But he wants to further explore something that Loon touched upon: "It's important to love yourself. You are the only you you're ever going to have," says Tigga.

Lloyd Banks seems to have little problem knowing or loving himself. In his song "Warrior," he even raps, *I'm smooth as the Isleys / Sometimes I surprise me*. But one thing he doesn't love is hurtful labels, like calling his oeuvre "gangster music." He prefers to brand it "conscious music—because I'm conscious of what I'm sayin' the whole time."

Things are getting pretty heavy, and are made only more so when a spokesman from one of the summit's corporate sponsors takes the mike. The sponsors are PlayStation 2 and Anheuser-Busch, representing two young-people favorites: video games and beer. That, however, doesn't stop the Anheuser-Busch executive from saying, "I'd like to take a crack at the purpose of life . . ." The mood lightens considerably, however, when rapper Bone Crusher, who looks to be pushing 300 lbs., arrives late, goes up to center stage upon his introduction, lifts up his shirt and waves his big jelly belly at the audience. They scream like they've just had a leg caught in a trap. It's not clear if Bone Crusher has energized the electorate for November. But surely, it's a healthy start.

Message-wise, the summiteers have difficulty focusing. Russell Simmons speaks about the importance of going to the library. He pronounces it "liberry." Three times. When congresswoman Maxine Waters comes out, she vows to fight for freedom of speech, because "we're not afraid of young people singing and rapping their minds, okay?" When Detroit mayor Kwame Kilpatrick, known as the "hip-hop mayor," is introduced, he takes several shots at Newt Gingrich's "Contract on America," a very timely talking point, back in 1995. Other rappers decry Nike's high prices, trying to persuade the crowd to buy brands like Puffy's Sean Jean or Simmons's Phat Farm. After all, black people can make overpriced designer goods, too.

When Banks appears at the rear of the arena to do a television interview, a good fifth of the crowd, ignoring the panel discussion, simply charges from their seats to surround him. A despondent Ben Chavis implores them to return as he says something a grown man hopes never has to be spoken, "Okay, if you wanna see the Ying Yang Twins, they're going to be up here!"

There is of course—nonprofit status be damned—the requisite amount of subtle Bush-bashing, such as when Bone Crusher says, "It don't matter where you from, we are all one people, black, white, green, whatever color it is, we have to get George Bush out of office." If Bush is president for four more years, Bone Crusher says he probably won't have a job in two or three, presumably because the White House will see to it that jobs writing rhymes like his own "Gettin' It (Get Dat Money)" will be outsourced to India. But Simmons wants to make clear that they are not naked partisans. They even invited George W. Bush to share the stage with the likes

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of Mr. Crusher. For some reason, Bush didn't respond.

The spirit of the afternoon is perhaps best summed up by Loon, who proves, yet again, that he is unfairly monikered. "Y'all know how to pick the best videos. Y'all know how to pick the best artists. Y'all know how to pick the real artists from the fake artists. Y'all got the best radar you could possibly have. And what I urge you all to do is take the same initiative and do the same homework that you do when you listen to these artists. I need you to read about these candidates." Despite Loon's words of wisdom, I can't be certain the audience will take his words to heart. When I ask the girl next to me, wearing a "Mandela" summer-camp shirt, who she'll vote for, she doesn't have an answer. And for good reason—she probably doesn't even know the candidates, because she's 9 years old.

Such is the problem with appealing to youth. The 18- to 24-year-old demographic stays home in droves every election. And the below-18-year-olds are even worse, seeing as how they're not allowed to vote. This would seem to be a weakness of a Hip-Hop Summit where half the audience is unable to participate in the process that is being championed, and the issue that most animates them is whether Twista or Jadakiss is dreamier.

After the summit concludes I stop at the back of the arena at the voter registration kiosk. Manning it is Michael Chinetti of Boston's Election Department. I ask him if potential new voters flocked to him in droves. "Most of them can't," he says. "They're not old enough." Instead, he gave them a mock-up ballot just to let them go through the exercise. Youngsters were able to cast a vote for Bullwinkle J. Moose for Board of Cartoon characters, or Wonder Woman for Super Heroes Committee. When I ask how many people legitimately registered to vote during the five-hour summit, Chinetti says, "Let's check." He pulls the afternoon's take out of an envelope. Out of the roughly 4,000 people filling the arena, he says, there were "about 25 to 30."

Outside of the arena, the Ying Yang Twins of tomorrow peddle their wares. At one card table sits a group named "Simply Hood." I strike up a conversation with two of its members, Science and Exclusive. A boombox plays a single, "Hey Playa!," from their debut album, *As the Hood Turns*. The bustle of commerce commences as Science, or maybe it's Exclusive, sings *Smoke some reefa / Gonna get a bite to eat*. I ask Science if it's been tough going today, what with everyone inside the arena concentrating on civic involvement. "No," he says. They've done all right. They're selling their CD for five dollars a pop. How many units have they moved? Science pages through a stack of bills, "Ummmmm, about 25 to 30." ♦

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An Oil-for-Food Connection?

Unexplored in the 9/11 and Iraq investigations is whether any of Saddam's loot made its way into Osama's pockets.

By Claudia Rosett

If, as the 9/11 Commission concludes, our "failure of imagination" left America open to the attacks of September 11, then surely some imagination is called for in tackling one of the riddles that stumped the commission: Where exactly did Osama bin Laden get the funding to set up shop in Afghanistan, reach around the globe, and strike the United States?

So let's do some imagining. Unfashionable though it may be, let's even imagine a money trail that connects Saddam Hussein to al Qaeda.

By 1996, remember, bin Laden had been run out of Sudan, and seems to have been out of money. He needed a fresh bundle to rent Afghanistan from the Taliban, train recruits, expand al Qaeda's global network, and launch what eventually became the 9/11 attacks. Meanwhile, over in Iraq about that same time, Saddam Hussein, after a lean stretch under United Nations sanctions, had just cut his Oil-for-Food deal with the U.N., and soon began exploiting that program to embezzle billions meant for relief.

Both Saddam and bin Laden were, in their way, seasoned businessmen. Both had a taste for war. Both hated America. By the late 1990s, Saddam, despite continuing sanctions, was solidly back in business, socking away his purloined billions in secret accounts, but he had no way to attack the United States directly. Bin Laden needed millions to fund al Qaeda, which could then launch a direct strike on the United States. Whatever the differences between Saddam and bin Laden, their circumstances by the late 1990s had all the makings of a deal. Pocket change for Saddam, financial security for bin Laden, and satisfaction for both—death to Americans.

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Now let's talk facts. In 1996, Sudan kicked out bin Laden. He went to Afghanistan, arriving there pretty much bankrupt, according to the 9/11 Commission report. His family inheritance was gone, his allowance had been cut off, and Sudan had confiscated his local assets. Yet, just two years later, bin Laden was back on his feet, feeling strong enough to issue a public declaration of war on America. In February 1998, in a London-based Arabic newspaper, *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, he published his infamous fatwa exhorting Muslims to "kill the Americans and plunder their money." Six months later, in August 1998, al Qaeda finally went ahead with its long-planned bombing of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. Bin Laden was back in the saddle, and over the next three years he shaped al Qaeda into the global monster that finally struck on American soil. His total costs, by the estimates of the 9/11 Commission report, ran to tens of millions of dollars. Even for a terrorist beloved of extremist donors, that's a pretty good chunk of change.

The commission report says bin Laden got his money from sources such as a "core group of financial facilitators" in the Gulf states, especially corrupt charities. But the report concludes: "To date, we have not been able to determine the origin of the money used for the 9/11 attack. Al Qaeda had many sources of funding and a pre-9/11 annual budget estimated at $30 million. If a particular source of funds had dried up, al Qaeda could easily have found enough money elsewhere to fund the attack."

Elsewhere? One obvious "elsewhere" that no one seems to have seriously considered was Saddam's secret geyser of money, gushing from the so-called Oil-for-Food program. That possibility is not discussed in the 9/11 report, and apparently it was not included in the investigation. A 9/11 Commission spokesman confirms that the commission did not request Oil-for-Food documentation from the U.N., and none was offered.

Why look at Oil-for-Food? Well, let's review a little more history. When Saddam invaded Kuwait in 1990, the

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U.N. imposed sanctions, which remained in place until 2003, when the United States and its allies finally toppled Saddam. But in 1996, with the aim of providing for the people of Iraq while still containing Saddam, the U.N. began running its Oil-for-Food relief program for Iraq. Under terms agreed to by the U.N., Saddam got to sell oil to buy such humanitarian supplies as food and medicine, to be rationed to the Iraqi population. But the terms were hugely in Saddam's favor. The U.N. let Saddam choose his own business partners, kept the details of his deals confidential, and while watching for weapons-related goods did not, as it turns out, exercise much serious financial oversight. Saddam turned this setup to his own advantage, fiddling prices on contracts with his hand-picked partners, and smuggling out oil pumped under U.N. supervision with U.N.-approved new equipment. Thus did we arrive at the recent General Accounting Office estimate that under Oil-for-Food, despite sanctions, Saddam managed to skim and smuggle for himself more than $10 billion out of oil sales meant for relief.

And the timing gets interesting, especially the year 1998. Not only was that the year in which bin Laden signaled his big comeback in Afghanistan. It was also the year in which Oil-for-Food jelled into a reliable vehicle for Saddam's scams, a source of enormous, illicit income.

Oil-for-Food was set up as a limited and temporary measure, starting operations in late 1996 with somewhat ad hoc administration by the U.N., and a mandate that had to be renewed by the Security Council every six months or so. Less than a year into the program, however, on October 15, 1997, U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan consolidated Oil-for-Food into what was effectively a permanent U.N. department—the Office of the Iraq Programme (OIP)—headed by a long-serving U.N. official, Benon Sevan. The Security Council still had to renew the mandate twice a year, but the process became routine.

Saddam began pushing the envelope, and it was quickly clear he could get away with a lot. Just two weeks after Annan set up the OIP, Saddam imposed conditions on the U.N. weapons inspectors that made it impossible for them to operate. Instead of shutting down Oil-for-Food, Annan on February 1, 1998, urged the Security Council to more than double the amount of oil Saddam was allowed to sell, a prelude to letting Iraq import oil equipment to increase production. Annan then flew to Baghdad to reason with Saddam, and on February 23, 1998 (having met in one of those palaces built under sanctions), Annan and Saddam reached an agreement that for at least a while allowed the weapons inspectors to return.

It was a busy time for al Qaeda as well. That same day, February 23, 1998, Osama bin Laden published his "Kill the Americans" fatwa. An intriguing feature of this fatwa was its prominent mention of Iraq, not just once, but four times. Analysts at the CIA and elsewhere have long propounded the theory that secular Saddam and religious Osama would not have wanted to work together. But Saddam's secular style seemed to bother bin Laden not a whit.

His fatwa presented three basic complaints. Mainly, he deplored the infidel presence in Saudi Arabia (i.e., the U.S. troops stationed there during and after the Gulf War). He also cited grievances about Jerusalem, while not even bothering to mention the Palestinians by name. The rest of his attention, bin Laden devoted to Iraq and "the Americans' continuing aggression against the Iraqi people" as well as "the great devastation inflicted on the Iraqi people by the crusader-Zionist alliance" and—here is the specific reference to U.S.-led sanctions—"the protracted blockade imposed after the ferocious war."

Two paragraphs later, bin Laden picked up this theme again, calling Iraq the "strongest neighboring Arab state" of Saudi Arabia, and then citing Iraq, yet again, as first on a list of four states threatened by America—the other three being Saudi Arabia (bin Laden's old home and a big source of terrorist funding), Egypt (birthplace of the terrorist Muslim Brotherhood and of bin Laden's top lieutenant, Ayman al Zawahiri, who also signed the fatwa), and Sudan (bin Laden's former base).

Until 1998, Iraq had not loomed large in bin Laden's rants. Why, then, such stress on Iraq, at that particular moment, in declaring war on America? It is certainly possible that bin Laden simply figured Iraq had become another good selling point, a handy way to whip up anger at the United States. But it is at least intriguing that the month after bin Laden's fatwa, in March 1998, as the 9/11 Commission reports, two al Qaeda members visited Baghdad. And in July 1998, "an Iraqi delegation traveled to Afghanistan to meet first with the Taliban and then with bin Laden."

Later in 1998, Saddam kicked out the weapons inspectors, and he would keep them out for the following four years. The U.N. in 1999 lifted the ceiling entirely on Saddam's oil exports and expanded the range of goods he could buy. It would keep his deals confidential to the end, and it let Saddam do business with scores of companies in such graft-friendly climes as Russia and Nigeria, as well as such terrorist-sponsoring places as Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Sudan, and such financial hideouts as Liechtenstein, Panama, Cyprus, and Switzerland.

Much of Saddam's illicit Oil-for-Food money has yet to be traced. There are now at least eight official investigations into various aspects of Oil-for-Food, but none so far that combines adequate staffing and access with a focus on

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Oil-for-Food itself as the little black book of Saddam's possible terrorist links. The same kind of bureaucratic walls that once blocked our own intelligence community from nabbing al Qaeda are here compounded by the problem that Oil-for-Food was not a U.S. program, but on U.N. turf. And though the U.N. is the keeper of many of the records, Kofi Annan has displayed no interest in investigating the possibility that Oil-for-Food might have funded terrorists. Nor has the Bush administration pursued the matter with the speed and terrorist-tracking expertise it deserves. Millions of documents believed to contain details of Saddam's Oil-for-Food deals, quite likely including leads to his illicit side deals, are reportedly locked up in Baghdad, socked away there by Paul Bremer this past spring, awaiting an audit from Ernst & Young that is just now getting underway—and not necessarily focused on possible terrorist ties. The U.N.'s own investigation, led by former Federal Reserve chairman Paul Volcker, seems interested mainly in the U.N. itself. Various congressional investigators who, unlike the 9/11 Commission, *are* looking at Oil-for-Food, have had a hard time prying even the most basic documents out of the U.N.

The U.S. Treasury Department, in its hunt for Saddam's assets, is not looking specifically at Oil-for-Food, but has provided some of the most telling snippets of information. In April of this year, Treasury released a list of Saddam front companies its investigation has so far uncovered, including a major Oil-for-Food contractor in the UAE, Dubai-based Al Wasel & Babel. Along with trying to procure a sophisticated surface-to-air missile system for Saddam, Al Wasel & Babel did hundreds of millions' worth of business with Baghdad under Oil-for-Food, and was just one of some 75 contractors authorized by the U.N. to deal with Saddam out of the UAE. (As it happens, the 9/11 Commission found that some of the hijackers' funding flowed through the UAE, but working backward from the al Qaeda end, the trail eventually vanishes.)

But enough of facts. Let's return to the realm of possibility. Imagine:

From about 1998 on, Oil-for-Food became Saddam's financial network, a system he gamed to produce huge amounts of illicit income, in partnership with folks who helped him hide and spend it. If some of that money was going to al Qaeda while Saddam was in power, it may still be serving as a terrorist resource today. Amid all the consternation over missed signals and poor coordination leading up to September 11, is it too much to ask that someone versed in terrorist finances, and able to access both the U.N. Oil-for-Food records and the documents squirreled away in Baghdad, take a look—an urgent, detailed, systematic look—at whether Saddam via his Oil-for-Food scams sent money to al Qaeda?

For such a deal, both Saddam and bin Laden had motive and opportunity. And if you read bin Laden's 1998 fatwa with just a little bit of imagination, those mentions of Iraq, at that particular moment, in those particular ways, carry a strong whiff of what is known in our own society as product placement: a message from a sponsor. ♦

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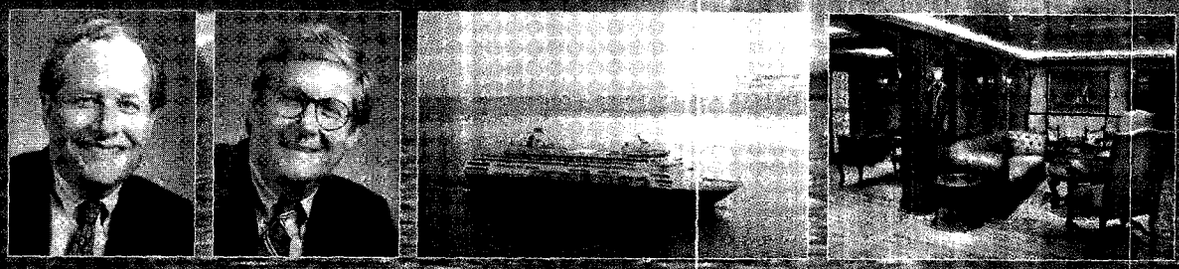

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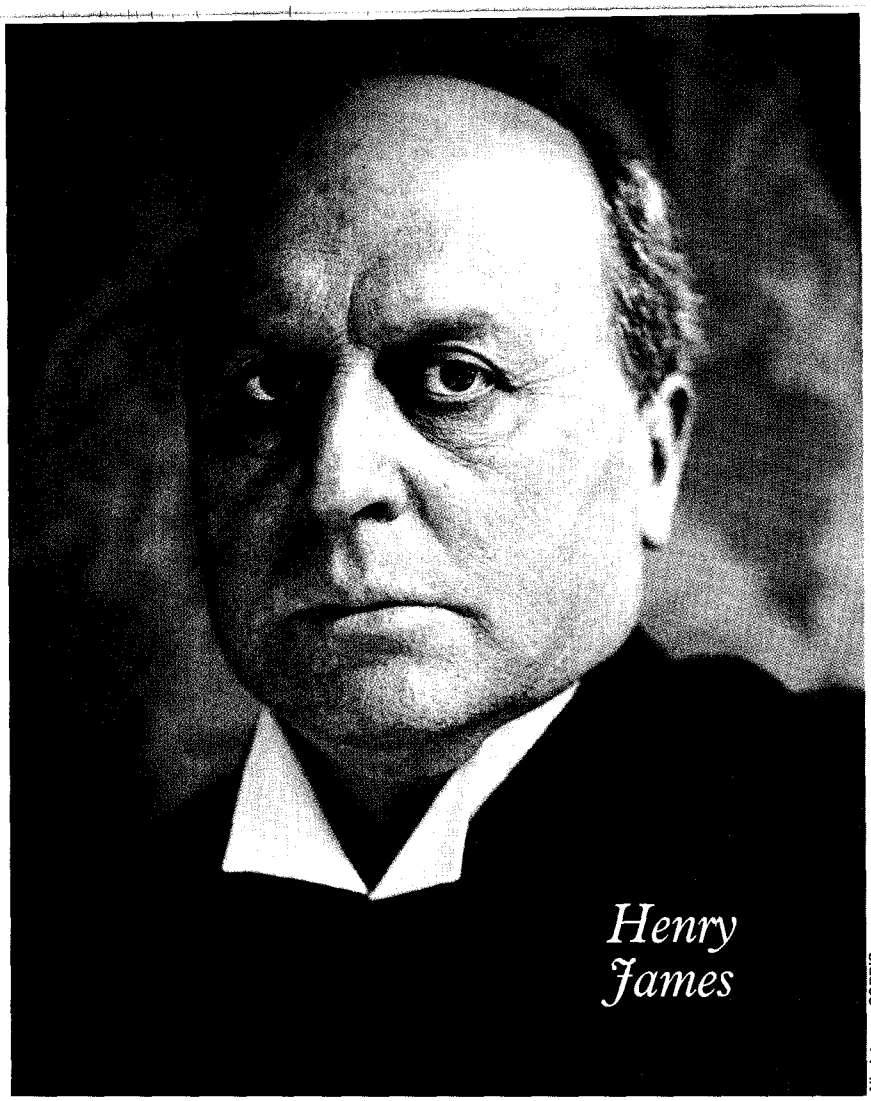
The Author as Character

What happens when you put Henry James in a novel?

By JOSEPH EPSTEIN



Henry James

All pictures: CORBIS.

Henry James is, of course, not everybody's cup of chamomile. He happens, though, to be mine. In case you are uncertain about whether he might also be yours, here, by way of a quick test, from the middle of his novel *What Maisie Knew*, is a Jamesian sentence for you to contemplate: "The immensity didn't include *them*; but if he had an idea at the back of his head she had also one in a recess as deep, and for a time, while they sat together, there was an extraordinary mute passage between her vision of this vision of his, and her vision of his vision of her vision." You cannot hope to comprehend that sentence with a ballgame, or perhaps even an air conditioner, on in the background.

The writing of Henry James, who admitted to glorying in complexity in every form (to the extent of wishing his own name were more complicated), requires that his reader be, as he said, a "person on whom nothing is lost." He requires the maximum attention—so imagine, then, the attention required not merely to read Henry James but to pretend you can think as he thought, get into his mind, thence to understand the wellsprings of his motives and the way his imagination worked. This, and no less, is what Colm Tóibín attempts in *The Master*, his biographical novel about Henry James.

Henry James has been the subject of many biographies, the most magisterial and voluminous (five volumes, in fact) of which is that by Leon Edel. Meanwhile, studies of James's work, in books and articles, are numerous beyond mere googling. The *Henry James Review*, considering all aspects of his life and work, is going into its twenty-sixth year.

The Master
by Colm Tóibín
Scribner, 352 pp., $25

Finally, there are those devoted to him in a manner whose fealty is perhaps best described in an account of the life of a writer named Ray Limbert in a Henry James short story called "The Next Time" and of whom the narrator, one of the devotees, remarks: "We are a numerous band, partakers of the same repose, who sit together in the shade of the tree, by the plash of the fountain, with the glare of the desert all around us and no greater vice that I know of but the habit of perhaps estimating people a little too much by what they think of a certain style."

As for that style, those of us who have come to admire it inevitably find ourselves at some point having to defend it. James's writing, let it be acknowledged, isn't easy. It has proven untranslatable in any other language: An excellent prison sentence for aesthetes convicted of major crimes might be to require them to translate *The Golden Bowl* into German.

The arrangement of James's sentences, especially in what is known sometimes as his "late style," sometimes as his "major phase," is lavish in its subordinations, qualifications, and circumambulations. The extreme complexity of this late style is often attributed to his taking on a secretary—

Joseph Epstein is a contributing editor to THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

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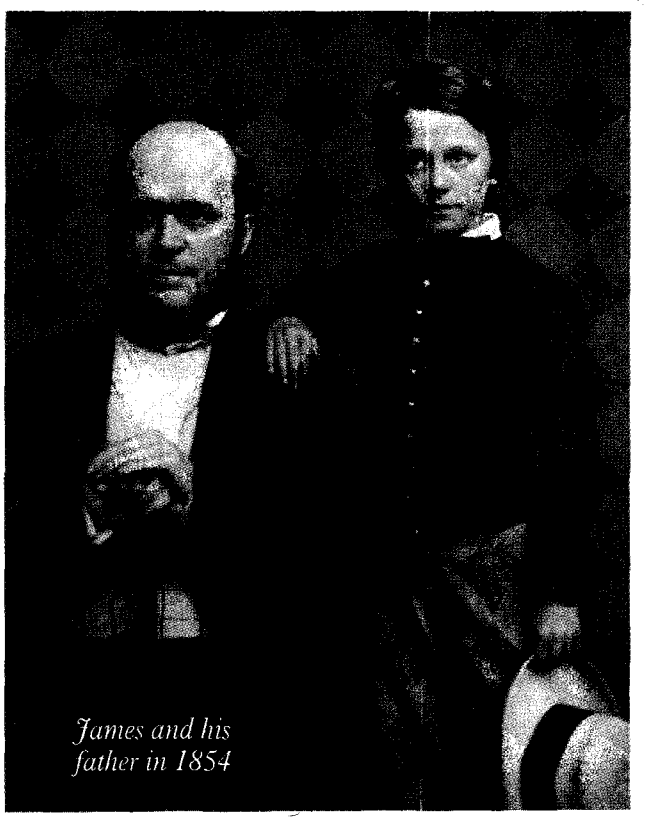
owing to a problem with the wrist of his writing hand—to whom he dictated his later novels. But it is just as possible that it was owing to James's seeing the world in even greater complication than ever before. He once told his brother that he wished he could write as he spoke; and in the end, the typist in his study clacking away, causing what he called "an embroidered veil of sound," he did exactly that.

Style, it is good to remember, is only superficially a matter of syntax, diction, and rhythm; in a great writer, style is a manner of seeing the world. Perhaps the best way to work one's way through James's late style is to recall *The American Scene*, the book he wrote about his return to the United States in 1904, where he referred to himself as "the restless analyst" and as someone "hagridden by the twin demons of observation and imagination." He was assailed by perception, all but overtaken by impressions; simply put, he saw more than the rest of us. James thought as he wrote; and each of his sentences is best read and understood as an act of cerebration of a hyper-subtle mind trying to get things just right, or, as they say in gymnastics, to nail it. And nail it he did, an astonishingly high percentage of the time.

The other difficulty Henry James presents to the uninitiated reader is that he may at first sometimes seem to have chewed a lot more than he bit off and that he tended to go mountain climbing, in full gear, on molehills. But, then, his subject by choice was the social one: Within his novels and stories the puzzles of the universe and the relation of man to God are not featured, or even considered; what he quarried was the proper relations of human beings as they work out conflicting wills and are called upon to make (invariably) complex moral decisions. As Desmond MacCarthy put it in a splendid memoir-essay on James, what fascinated Henry James is "whatever in life fascinates by being hidden, ambiguous, illusive, and hard to understand."

James was possibly the most careful scrutinizer of human motive that the world has ever known, and his own motives (apart from the desire, as he put it when a young man, "to produce some little exemplary works of art") have been endlessly gone into, but not yet, in my view, impressively captured. Was James too brilliantly elusive to be pinned to the velvet, splendid literary butterfly that he was, by the biographer's art? My own sense is that he may well have been. Biographers can capture his days, show us this being organized for literature through his letters and notebooks, but can they genuinely know what caused him to thrum and vibrate and create the amazing works he did?


James and his father in 1854

Every biography is under the obligation to tell a story about its subject: to find a pattern (the term "the figure in the carpet" is the title of a Henry James story), bring coherence, create drama, and, above all, offer an explanation of the true meaning of the life under investigation. Leon Edel's biography of James was in part a Freudian story, featuring sibling rivalry between Henry and his equally famous brother, the philosopher William. *Henry James: The Imagination of Genius* by Fred Kaplan is instead the story of homosexuality thwarted and sublimated into art. Lyndall Gordon's *A Private Life of Henry James: Two Women and His Art* is feminist in impulse and portrays James as (symbolically if not actually) a killer of two women through deliberately ignoring their calls for his attention and help. These and other biographies add to the body of information about Henry James, but my sense is that no biography—such is the subtlety of James—has finally laid a glove on him.

Might fiction achieve what biography cannot? In *The Master*, Colm Tóibín, an Irish novelist, uses the methods of fiction, James's own favorite instrument of truth-telling. Tóibín has handled his self-imposed assignment with considerable art; his novel has been widely praised; but it is a work that, presenting more problems than solutions, does not finally persuade, at least not this reader and admirer of James.

Historical fiction, which Henry James himself called "humbug," is laced with landmines. Chief among them is that, despite one's best efforts, the present has a way of leaking in, in ways large and small. In the realm of the small, in his novel Tóibín uses the cant words "parenting" and "scenario," neither of which was available in the late (and linguistically lucky) nineteenth century. But the greater danger is that, try to prevent it though one may, the psychology of the current day will seep into the thinking of the historical novelist's characters and deeply corrupt the story itself. Colm

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Tóibín does not quite escape this pitfall either.

The Master is set between the years 1895 and 1899, with frequent returns to James's past to pick up, as the screenwriters say, backstory. James's remarkable family is introduced, his civilian years during the American Civil War, his relationships with his contemporaries among the remarkable young men and women in his Brahminish Boston social set, his London life and later days in his house in Rye, in Sussex.

Tóibín has written a work of great skill and ingenuity. The art in this novel derives from the style he has devised to observe Henry James's own thoughts and observations in a manner that seems in every way but one fitting. The only absence is James's comic sense, which was pervasive in his life and writing and is missed by too many of his impatient readers. What is remarkable about Tóibín's invention is that it is not in any way a copy of James's own style, but one that, at the level of sensibility, is nonetheless believably Jamesian. Here, in a characteristic passage, is a description of James at work:

> He loved walking up and down the room, beginning a new sentence, letting it snake ahead, stopping it for a moment, adding a phrase, a brief pause, and then allowing the sentence to gallop to an elegant and fitting conclusion. He looked forward to starting in the morning, his typist punctual, uncomplaining, seemingly indifferent as though the words uttered by the novelist equaled in interest and importance his previous work in the commercial sector.

Tóibín begins his novel at Henry James's period of recovery after the bruising theatrical failure of his play *Guy Domville*. His increasingly complex novels never having found a wide readership, his relations with magazine editors growing drearier and drearier—the *Atlantic* had recently rejected his fine story "The Pupil"—James initially turned to the theater in the hope of making a serious financial score, to win, as he put it, "fame and shekels."

Guy Domville opened the same night as did Oscar Wilde's *Ideal Husband*, which James went to see, as Tóibín records, in the hope of relieving the tension of watching his own play. Unimpressed by the Wilde play, James returned to the theater in which his own play had been mounted in time for its ending. In the wings at the close, he was pushed by the stage-manager out before the curtain, there presumably to receive plaudits. Instead, along with intermittent applause, he was hooted and jeered. This man who had long kept himself detached from the public, had now met it straight on, and neither showed much taste for the other. James was devastated. "Produce again—produce; produce better than ever," he told himself, "and all will be well." And so it would be, though I'm not sure Colm Tóibín would agree.

For a true writer, little is ever wasted, nothing a total loss. From his theatrical defeat, James acquired what he called the "scenic method of composition," by which one builds to crucial dramatic scenes and which he now put to use in the novels of his major phase. Colm Tóibín uses this method, too, in *The Master*, by taking up a limited number of carefully chosen scenes in Henry James's life that are intended to stand for the whole. Everything, in such a method, hangs on finding exactly the right scenes to highlight.

Among the scenes Tóibín chooses are the *Guy Domville* defeat, a summer month during James's youth spent at Newport, Rhode Island, his avoiding service in the Civil War with (Tóibín believes) a bogus back injury, his complex relationship with his invalid sister Alice, his acquiring his house in Rye, a number of meetings with the American novelist Constance Fenimore Woolson, his relationship with an ambitious young sculptor named Hendrik Andersen, and a visit from his brother William and his family. Using material gleaned in James's letters and notebooks and even his criticism, Tóibín also cleverly shows James acquiring the kernels of information on which he would base many of his great stories and novels.

One could, of course, just as easily have chosen other scenes to emphasize: James's many meetings with Edith Wharton, for instance. Or his relationship with a rogue journalist named Morton Fullerton and his burning of a vast number of his own letters to protect his privacy. Equally, one could have chosen his preparation of the New York Edition of his novels (which was commercially disappointing), or his final return to the United States to write *The American Scene*, or his lingering death by a series of small strokes.

A reviewer of *The Master* in the *Los Angeles Times* remarked that "the more one already knows about James, the more rewarding this novel will seem." I found quite the reverse to be true: The more one knows, the more seems missing. Part of the power of a strong novel is the novelist's allowing us to imagine what we do not know. But in the case of Tóibín's hero, Henry James, we already know; we need not imagine. And herein lies the ultimate weakness of a novel based on a famous personage.

Tóibín chose the scenes he did because they tell the story he wants to tell. *The Master* begins with James staying at the Irish estate of his high-born English friends, Sir Garnet and Lady Wolseley, the former then commander in chief of the English forces in Dublin. While there, James remembers an unfulfilled encounter, when he was young, with a young man named Paul Joukowsky, below whose window in Paris he awaits in the rain, yearningly, for hours for some signal from the third-floor apartment to come up and consummate what Tóibín paints as a patently homoerotic friendship. But no signal is given. In Tóibín's novel, James returns home to write a story in which Paul does come down for him, "and they had walked up the stairs together in silence. And it was very clear—Paul had made it clear—what would happen." The rest of the story, Tóibín writes, "could never be written. . . . The rest of the story was imaginary and it was something he would never allow himself to put into words."

With this scene early in the novel, Tóibín announces his theme for *The Master* and begins pulling together the threads that are to form what he must believe is the figure in Henry

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James's own carpet. Capacious though that carpet is shown to be in *The Master*—the theme does not dominate everything—repressed homosexuality is the figure that plays over its rich surface.

One wonders if Colm Tóibín's own openly declared homosexuality does not make this theme more attractive to him than it might otherwise be. The one previous novel of Tóibín's I've read, *The Story of the Night*, though set in Buenos Aires, is chiefly about the difficulties and dangers of homosexual life even now. He has also written a study of homosexual writers.

In Henry James's day, of course, these difficulties and dangers were much more intense, the stakes set much higher. In James's day, too, thoughts of sex were not so dominant. One could be considered perfectly unexceptional living out one's days as a bachelor uncle or a spinster—a person who was not domineered by sexual drive—without being thought twisted and tortured by one's repression. We owe to Sigmund Freud the notion, still standing long after most of his other doctrines have tumbled down, that nothing defines us as much as the little pile of our dirty secrets, sexual secrets above all.

James c. 1860

In various scenes in *The Master*, Tóibín has James go up to the line of confronting what he takes to be his homosexual nature, but, unable to confront it to the point of acting upon it, has him back away. Hostesses assign handsome young servants to James when he is their house guest, but he cannot make his move. An American sculptor very much on the artistic make at first appeals to him, but he is put off by the young man's vulgar ambition. At one point, Tóibín, taking his material from Sheldon Novick's *Henry James: The Young Master*, even tosses the naked James in the sack with a naked Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. (they are staying in a summer boarding house with a shortage of beds), though again to no conclusion other than longing and restive sleep.

Truth, the old cliché has it, is stranger than fiction; and the reason is that, unlike fiction, truth needn't be consistent. Truth can also be much more ambiguous than fiction. What is the truth about Henry James in the realm of sex? Leon Edel, himself an earnest Freudian and a man who had devoted more of his life than anyone else to James, felt that there was no "technical" evidence that Henry James had ever made physical love to another human being, and no one has since ever discovered otherwise.

Although many of James's novels and stories are not without their subtly erotic charge, he was supremely the artist who knew it was best to leave erotic detail to the imagination of the reader. James was the master of not telling all—of knowing precisely what it is important *not* to tell, and this certainly included what he once called "the basely erotic." Writing to Paul Bourget, he remarks that "your out-and-out eroticism displeases me as well as this exposition of dirty linens and dirty towels. In a word, all this is far from being life as I feel it, as I see it, as I know it, as I wish to know it."

The novelist Hugh Walpole, who claimed once to have offered himself sexually to James (offer refused), wrote that "he was curious about everything, he *knew* everything, but his Puritan taste would shiver with apprehension. There was no crudity of which he was unaware but he did not wish that crudity to be named."

Early in life, James declared himself happiest as a bachelor, and, as Leon Edel writes, "he saw no reason why he should change his pleasant celibate status for one that might prove a threat to his art and his personal sovereignty." The notion of Henry James entering into a homosexual, or indeed a heterosexual, relationship with another human being is, not to put too fine a point on it, unthinkable. Henry James, happily bonking away, would not be Henry James. Besides, he was already uxoriously married to his art.

That marriage required the most perfect detachment imaginable. In his essay on James, Desmond MacCarthy wrote: "There is a kind of detachment (it is to be felt in the deeply religious, in some artists, in some imaginative men of action), which seems to bring the possessor of it at once nearer to his fellow beings than others get, and at the same time to remove him into a kind of solitude. I think Henry James was aware of that solitude to an extraordinary degree." For James, as MacCarthy also wrote, "to appreciate exquisitely was to live intensely. . . . His art was a refuge to him as well as the purpose of his life."

At the same time, James knew there was a steep price to pay for this arrangement. When Desmond MacCarthy told

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James he loved participation in life too much to devote himself to writing, James said to him: "Yes, it is solitude. If [the artistic life] runs after you and catches you, well and good. But for heaven's sake don't run after *it*. It is absolute solitude."

"The port from which I set out was, I think, *the essential loneliness of my life*," James wrote to Morton Fullerton, "and it seems to be the port also, in sooth, to which my course finally directs itself! This loneliness (since I mention it)—what is it still but the deepest thing about one"? Through this loneliness, the solitude forced upon him by his art, which also required a concomitant detachment from all other human beings, James became the great artist that he was.

There were other compensations. Writing about his own unending appetite for life to a soured and disappointed Henry Adams, James credited his continued pleasure at the spectacle of life to the fact that he was himself "that queer monster, the artist, an obstinate finality, an inexhaustible sensibility," which gave his days a perpetual bloom of interest and promise. Henry James long before had made with himself a deal—he would draw his passion more from the observation than the living of life—which in his particular case paid off handsomely.

Colm Tóibín grasps this only partially. Henry James, I think, would have loathed this book, not only for its coarse invasion of his privacy but for its telling the story of his life in a way that he would have found untrue and therefore unacceptable. Just as biography cannot be a form of fiction, he would likely have informed Colm Tóibín, neither can fiction finally succeed as biography.

In a normal novel, the novelist has omniscience, and, unless he is inept, knows everything about his characters. In a novel based on true, or once-living, characters, he loses that omniscience and the necessary authority based upon it. Henry James, a brilliant critic of fiction, would have had no hesitation in informing Tóibín that what he was attempting in *The Master* couldn't be done. ♦

Our Man in Kabul

A nineteenth-century American meets Afghanistan.

BY CORTRIGHT MCMEEL

Generations of Americans grew up on the deeds of such mythologized frontier heroes as Lewis and Clark, Daniel Boone, and Davy Crockett. Ben Macintyre's entertaining and illuminating biography *The Man Who Would Be King: The First American in Afghanistan* suggests these icons had an unheralded peer: Josiah Harlan, an adventurer of quixotic spirit and supreme courage whose travails were every bit as harrowing as those of his legendary compatriots.

The Man Who Would Be King
The First American in Afghanistan
by Ben Macintyre
Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 351 pp., $25

Unfortunately, Harlan acted on a stage that does not exist in textbooks of American history. But while the journey of Josiah Harlan fails to resonate in our national lore, his story reveals a resourcefulness and ambiguity that is quintessentially American. In the early 1800s, when his fellow countrymen were heading west to seek their fortune, Harlan found a way to go east. The restless Quaker left an affluent home in Pennsylvania to join the merchant marine. At the docks in Calcutta he received a letter informing him that his fiancée back home no longer wished to see him. Stunned, Harlan plunged into tribal Afghanistan and one of the stranger chapters in the history of Central Asia.

A student of both poetry and botany, a scholar obsessed with the ancient classics, a mercenary whose travels were initiated by rejection in love, Harlan was a man steeped in the Romantic tradition. It is thus fitting that his legacy would prove worthy of a work of literature, his exploits becoming the likely inspiration for Rudyard Kipling's novella "The Man Who Would Be King." To enable the reader to fully appreciate the epic nature of Josiah Harlan's achievements, Macintyre carefully positions this out-of-place Yankee within the larger historical framework of nineteenth-century geopolitics.

In the 1830s, the two largest empires in the world, imperial Great Britain and czarist Russia, struggled to dominate Central Asia in a contest that became known as the "Great Game." For eighty years, the English and the Russians employed diplomacy, trade, warfare, and espionage in an effort to win over the more powerful princes and khans of the lands that reached from the north of India to Russia's southern border in the Caucasus. It was in the early years of this tumultuous period that Josiah Harlan appeared.

Macintyre succeeds in capturing the spirit and arrogance that drove Harlan. Within a few weeks of making an appearance in Ludhiana, a river town south of the Punjab, Harlan acquired an audience with the deposed king of Kabul, Shah Shujah. Harlan convinced the shah to give him money and command of a small army, so that he could march on Kabul three hundred miles north and retake the shah's usurped territory.

What follows is a tale that reads like the ultimate survivor's handbook. Harlan was something of a dilettante, a man with no formal military training, and yet, time and time again he surmounted seemingly impossible challenges. Confronted by a mutiny of his irregular troops, Harlan survived by offering his irate militia the bags of Shah Shujah's gold. He recounted in his diary: "All the valuables of my

Cortright McMeel is a writer in Baltimore.

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establishment I had secretly packed away in ordinary loads which were . . . placed on the camels, trusting nothing to the Rohillahs but the camp equipage and trunks of books." Soon after Harlan adopted the disguise of a holy man to pass through a hostile town. Confronted by a mullah, Harlan faced certain death if exposed as an infidel impostor. Lacking knowledge of either the native language or the Koran, he feigned religious contemplation, ultimately satisfying the mullah with his pontificating gaze and solemn aspect. His acme was not limited to clever bluffs, however. His surgical skills won over more than a share of khans and princes. More than once he operated on cataract-stricken Afghans, a feat that would win him an interview with the one-eyed Prince of Lahore, Ranjit Singh.

While Harlan's wits and raw nerve kept him alive, it was his considerable diplomatic skills and keen political mind that allowed him to flourish. In 1827 he led Shah Shujah's army to overthrow Dost Muhammed Khan of Kabul. Failing in this venture, he went on to persuade the prince of Lahore to award him a governorship, a coveted but highly dangerous position—given that the prince had a fetish for removing the noses of those who failed him. A contemporary commented on Harlan's adroit gubernatorial skills, writing: "The fact of his nose being entire, proved that he had done well."

His reputation as a tough and skilled diplomat grew to greater heights when he outwitted and outmaneuvered the prince's most significant foe, Dost Muhammed Khan. Soon after, Khan, the very man he had bested months earlier, offered Harlan the coveted post of head vizier of his kingdom.

To navigate the labyrinthine diplomacy and Byzantine politics of the antiquated and complex power structure that existed in Central Asia in the 1800s was no mean task. Macintyre illuminates Harlan's talents by comparing him to one exceptional peer, the British officer Sir Alexander Burnes. This young upstart had earned fame as the first Englishman to sail up the Sutlej River. Harlan, however, would outlast his English contemporary and sometime rival—though Burnes and the British seemed to have the upper hand when they occupied Kabul in 1839.

CORBIS

Afghanistan in the 1880s.

Triumphant, they cavorted with the Afghan women, smoked cigars, and played cricket. Harlan, ever the moral, sober Quaker, foresaw the results of such behavior and wrote in his diary: "Vainglorious and arrogant, the invaders plunged headlong toward destruction." Months later, Burnes and the entire British garrison would be mercilessly slaughtered by the tribesmen of Kabul.

Macintyre invests his subject with a humanity that, perhaps, sets him apart from all the other soldiers, traders, and spies that played their hand in the Great Game. In 1838, serving as head vizier and general for Dost Muhammed Khan, Harlan took his army north to annihilate the slave trader and bandit king of Kunduz, Murad Beg. "The idea of punishing a notorious slave dealer appealed to Harlan's sense of moral justice, but there was another compelling reason. . . . In 329 B.C., Alexander the Great had crossed the Hindu Kush. . . . Here was an opportunity to pursue Alexander's trail still deeper into the interior."

It was a fateful campaign. When it was over, he assumed a role and achieved a status beyond anything Davy Crockett could have imagined. The Hazara people of Turkistan bestowed upon him the powers and title of the prince of Ghor. As wily as Sitting Bull, as pushy as George Patton, as self-righteous as Cotton Mather, Harlan seized greatness in a place far more convoluted and alien than anything his contemporaries faced in America. Macintyre should be lauded for reviving this indomitable figure from the mists of time. ♦

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Manchurian Remake

From liberal anti-communism to liberal lunacy.

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

There's never been a movie remotely like the old version of *The Manchurian Candidate*, the 1962 film starring Frank Sinatra. It was, by turns, a paranoid thriller, a dysfunctional family melodrama with more than a hint of incest, a horror film, and the blackest of black comedies.

Unfortunately, there have been a lot of movies like the new version of *The Manchurian Candidate*. Starring Denzel Washington, it is an amalgam of *The X-Files*, Oliver Stone's *JFK* and *Nixon*, Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11*, and a forgotten 1974 film called *The Parallax View*. Even more, it's like the hundreds upon hundreds of Bush-hating ads on the website MoveOn.org.

The original *Manchurian Candidate* was, in the words of Pauline Kael, "the most sophisticated political satire ever made in this country." The new *Manchurian Candidate* is neither sophisticated nor satirical—but it sure is political. The film is like a comic-book illustration of every single liberal-left cliché of the era after the attacks of September 11.

What's worse, it is also ill-conceived, and I don't say this because I dislike its politics—though I do, God knows. But *JFK* was politically horrendous and nonetheless remained a spectacular feat of cinematic storytelling. That's not the case with the new *Manchurian Candidate*. The critics who praise it—and most critics seem to be falling all over themselves to worship at its feet—are doing so because they like its politics and are entirely willing to overlook the degree to which it is a creative calamity.

John Podhoretz is a contributing editor to THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

The first *Manchurian Candidate* is ideologically unclassifiable. It makes vicious fun of Joseph McCarthy's Red hunt inside the American government, while at the same time positing a worldwide Communist conspiracy so immense and effective that it is seeking to place an unwitting Soviet dupe in the White House.

McCarthy, called John Yerkes Iselin in the 1962 film, is a moronic drunk. "I'd be a lot happier if we could just settle on the number of Communists I know there are in the Defense Department," Iselin whines to his wife. ("Fifty-seven," she replies, while staring at a bottle of Heinz steak sauce.) It turns out that he is the unwitting Soviet dupe. His wife Ellie is the Soviet agent who controls him—and the Communists decide diabolically to bind her more closely to them by turning her son Raymond Shaw into a brainwashed assassin who will ensure his hated stepfather's ascension to the presidency. The movie is a cinematic exploration of the liberal anti-Communist complaint about McCarthy: His actions so discredited honest anti-communism that McCarthy might just as well have been working for the Soviets.

The plot was the inspiration of Richard Condon, the novelist who all but invented the paranoid thriller. But the incredible wit and panache with which it was executed are due entirely to the crisp direction of John Frankenheimer and razor-sharp screenplay by George Axelrod. Yen Lo, the Manchurian brainwasher who turns the evil wife's son into a mindless assassin, speaks for Frankenheimer and Axelrod when he smilingly upbraids a fellow Commie conspirator: "You must try, Comrade Zilkov, to cultivate a sense of humor. There's nothing like a good laugh now and then to lighten the burdens of the day."

It's really too bad that director Jonathan Demme and screenwriters Daniel Pyne and Dean Georgaris, the men responsible for the remake, didn't take Yen Lo's advice. The new movie is absurdly solemn. In the original film, the terrifying effectiveness of the brainwashing is demonstrated when a platoon of American soldiers sits calmly listening to Soviet and Chinese party members having a discussion about them—all the while imagining that they are in the presence of a ladies' garden club in New Jersey.

In their eyes, Yen Lo the brainwasher is an elderly fat woman named Mrs. Whittaker. In one stunning moment, we get a look through the eyes of a black platoon member; his Mrs. Whittaker is a hefty black woman. The sequence is funny until it's not funny—until it becomes horrifying, that is, when Raymond Shaw calmly and without expression obeys an order to pick up a gun and shoot a fellow platoon member through the head.

In the new version, which has been updated to the present, the evil Ellie (played by Meryl Streep) is now a conservative senator in her own right. There's no husband in sight. And she is the secret agent for a corporation modeled on Dick Cheney's old employer, Halliburton. Only Ellie's not so secretly an agent, because the corporation (called Manchurian Global) is her biggest campaign contributor. Where exactly is the paranoid-thriller twist in the notion of a right-wing senator doing favors for a corporation?

Senator Ellie doesn't try to install a husband as vice president, but rather her son Raymond (Liev Schreiber). But why couldn't Ellie be the vice-presidential nominee herself? He's only a congressman, while she's a senator. The movie posits that her son must be the one to rise because he was awarded a Congressional Medal of Honor—an award he was given when the evil corporation hijacked his platoon during the 1991 Gulf War and brainwashed them all into believing he saved them.

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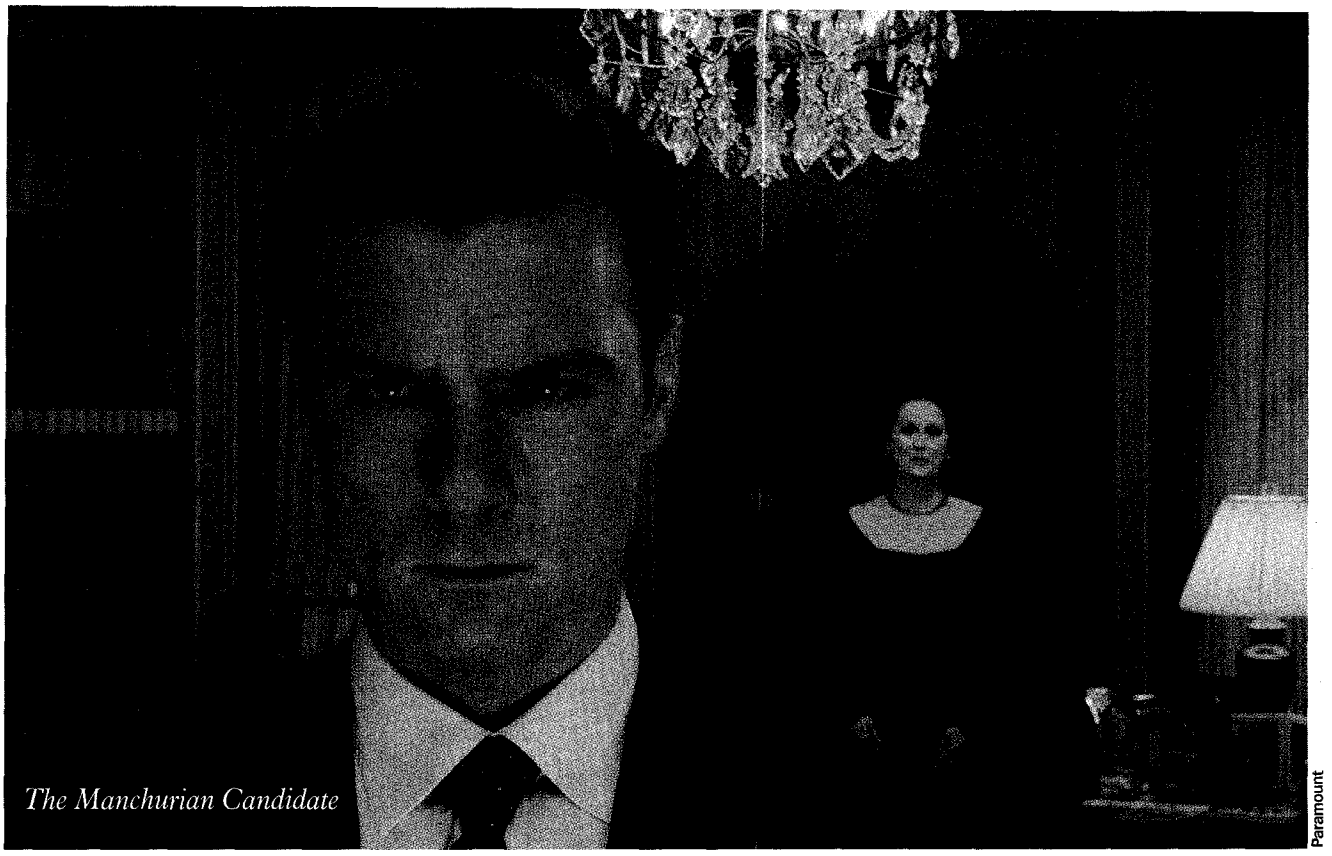

The Manchurian Candidate

Paramount

That, to put it mildly, makes no sense, even for a paranoid thriller. First of all, you don't need a Congressional Medal of Honor, as we know, to get to the White House. And second, there's no reason for Manchurian Global to hijack an entire platoon of people to brainwash Raymond. They could kidnap him off the streets of Washington and put an implant in his head without involving twelve other people whose brainwashing starts to wear off pretty soon after they come back from Kuwait.

In the original, Raymond is a sergeant during the Korean War. His platoon is targeted by the North Koreans because the Chinese specifically want to turn him into an assassin. Raymond and his platoon are also brainwashed into believing that the son performed exploits worthy of a Congressional Medal of Honor, but only to provide cover for the murder of the soldiers—whom the brainwashers have Raymond kill to prove his effectiveness.

The movie never bothers to explain why the evil Manchurian Global Corporation would have to go to all the trouble to brainwash people and try to install its own robot as president when, according to the movie, it's already running the planet. Manchurian makes the voting machines that, we learn, are already stealing elections. It sends privately funded armies to spell exhausted American troops. And, according to Ellie, it gives out untold millions to politicians across Washington.

In the imaginings of Demme and his screenwriters, the United States is to blame for the war on terror. This we learn from the speech by the saintly liberal senator (played by Jon Voight) that opens the film. "We need to look inward," he tells his party's convention. He says the United States deserved what it got because of twenty years of illegal actions abroad. The film suggests that the choice for vice president is neck-and-neck between this guy, who makes Michael Moore look like John Ashcroft, and the tough-on-terror Raymond Shaw.

In which party? In what universe? There would have been a way to remake *The Manchurian Candidate* that would have both retained the liberal sorrow and the worldwide-conspiracy worries that made the original film so bracing. Imagine the first movie's McCarthy character, but now morphed into the John Ashcroft of liberal fantasy—locking up librarians, trampling on civil rights, all in the name of the war on terror. Imagine that he is a widower, married to a fictionalized older version of Ann Coulter. Imagine, too, that Ann Coulter has a son named Raymond who went to war in Iraq, was briefly kidnapped, and escaped while saving the lives of others.

On the night of the State of the Union, Raymond is to be saluted by the president as he sits next to the first lady in the Capitol Building. On that night, Ashcroft is the cabinet member selected to journey to an undisclosed location lest there be a massive terrorist attack that wipes out the entire government. Ann Coulter, it turns out, is the al Qaeda agent. Raymond has been given a suitcase nuclear bomb. Once detonated, the John Ashcroft character will be the next president—and he will then capitulate to the worldwide Islamist conspiracy.

It's a pretty close parallel to the original, and I thought of it in about ten minutes. That means the people in Hollywood probably thought of it too. But they didn't want to make a movie in which al Qaeda was a villain. They wanted to make a movie that blames Halliburton for the world's ills. And they did. What a waste. ♦

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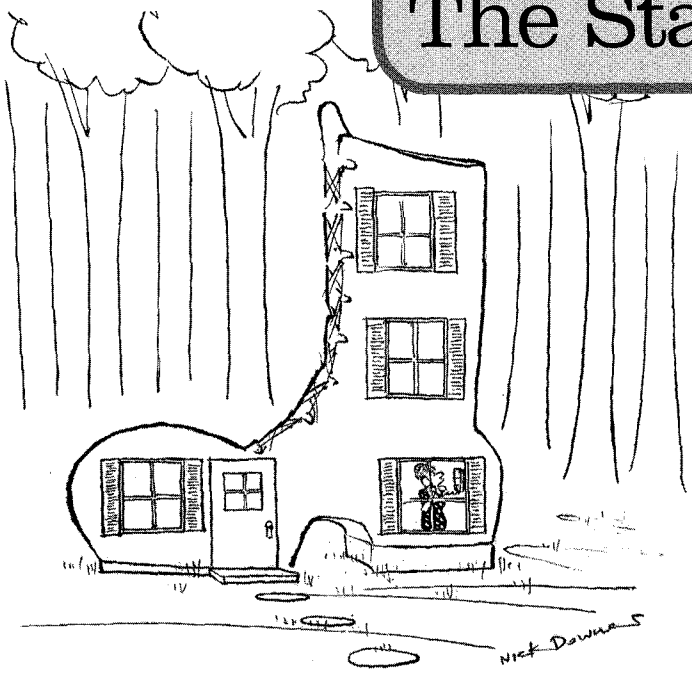
The Standard Reader



"Does Dr. Scholl make house calls?"

Books in Brief

***The Three-Martini Playdate: A Practical Guide to Happy Parenting* by Christie Mellor (Chronicle, 144 pp., $12.95).** I have fond memories of passing the gin-and-tonics at my grandparents' cocktail parties. After a round or two, though, I would be sequestered in the guest bedroom with a plate of cheese straws and a coloring book. Throughout the evening, various family members might pop their heads in, but it was never to ask me to recite "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star" for the company.

Things have changed. Nowadays, parties and much of the rest of life seem to be centered largely around offspring, and Christie Mellor wants to know: How can we bring back the good old days? *The Three-Martini Playdate* is her game plan. She alternates breezily between the voice of a 1950s housewife (to match her whimsically retro illustrations, most of which involve martinis) and that of an incredulous modern mom. "Remember when we couldn't wait to grow up so we could be in charge?" she asks parents, especially those whose children awaken to find that the tooth fairy has dropped $20.

In her world, evenings are for grownups, manners are for everyone, and the only acceptable pets are a lone goldfish. Similar sanity savers are outlined in such chapters as "Saying No to Your Child: It's a Kick!" and "Child Labor: Not Just For the Third World!" and "'Children's Music': Why?" (which wants to replace Raffi & Co. with XTC and Spike Jones).

Bonuses include tongue-in-cheek recipes (Lemonade for Grownups) and Helpful Hints (the Do-It-Yourself After-School Enrichment Program, featuring "Weeding for Fun" and "Delicious Snacks for Mom and Dad"). As for the toddler party scene: Try to remember that hiring the Mormon Tabernacle Choir to sing "Happy Birthday" is unlikely to become one of your three-year-old's treasured memories. Better to just blow up balloons, Mellor advises—and fill the martini pitcher for the grownups, as well.

—Susie Currie

***Betrayal: How Union Bosses Shake Down Their Members and Corrupt American Politics* by Linda Chavez and Daniel Gray (Crown, 288 pp., $25.95).** The labor unions are still exhaling in relief that Linda Chavez was forced to withdraw as President Bush's first nominee for labor secretary. But the former American Federation of Teachers employee has taken a seat at the labor policy table anyway by heading up an organization called "Stop Union Political Abuse."

Chavez insists in her new book *Betrayal* that the need to curtail union political spending is growing in urgency—primarily because public employees account for 46 percent of all union members. "The days of traditional union organizing are all but gone, despite the AFL-CIO's assertions to the contrary," Chavez and Gray write. "Public employees keep Big Labor afloat and, in turn, Big Labor uses its deep pockets and political clout to elect federal, state, and local officials committed to expanding the government, which of course will create more government jobs and thus more union members—and more dues."

Modern-day labor's collective bargaining with monopolistic, profitless entities is an arrangement early labor supporters thought impossible, indeed illogical. Still, as the book's title suggests, Chavez does not think unions are without merit. She and her coauthor would simply like to keep unions in check. The nation's largest union, the tax-exempt National Education Association, employs about 1,800 political operatives who are scattered across the nation, more than the Democratic and Republican national committees combined. Contrast that with the smaller Christian Coalition, which had its tax-exempt status temporarily revoked for putting out political literature.

Other reforms include giving legislative teeth to court decisions barring unions from spending mandatory dues on purposes unrelated to workers' issues and allowing workers to choose for themselves whether or not to accept union representation. While radical labor reform doesn't appear imminent, *Betrayal* in this political season reminds us with hard figures which groups exact the deepest bows from the men and women they put in office.

—Beth Henary

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Parody

"Mr. Edwards wrote 'most of the speech' himself, the official said, beginning with an outline scrawled in longhand followed by more than two dozen typewritten versions updated with marginalia during down periods on the campaign trail. . . . When Larry King asked him on CNN last week whether he had to clear his speeches with Mr. Kerry's campaign, Mr. Edwards demurred." **—New York Times, July 26, 2004**

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a place called Robbins.

My ~~pappy~~ father worked in a ~~rough ol'~~ mill all his life, and I will never forget the ~~gentle, down home folks~~ men and women who worked with him. They had ~~grease~~ lint in their hair and ~~flames on the sides of their cars~~ grease on their faces. They worked ~~like a pack o' mules~~ hard and tried to put a little something away every week ~~just to put~~ so that their kids and their grandkids could ~~some grits and okra on the table.~~ have a better life.

~~And y'all know what I'm talkin' bout.~~ And you know what I'm saying.

You don't need ~~some big ol' fancy Senator-type,~~ me to explain it to you, you know—you can't save any money, can you? Takes every dime you make just to pay your bills, and ~~y'all~~ you know what happens if something goes wrong—a child gets sick, ~~the down home general store closes, or there's a run on the bank~~ somebody gets laid off, or there's a financial problem. You go right off the cliff. And what's the first thing to go? [pause] ~~Your mower.~~ Your dreams.

So when you return home, you might pass a ~~mama~~ mother on her way to work the late-shift—you tell her ~~Chin up, you sweet, sweet woman. John Edwards says it's gonna be okay.~~ ~~Vote Edwards/Kerry 2004—whoo!~~ hope is on the way!

And when you wake up and sit with your kids at the kitchen table, ~~talkin' about fishing, the Good Lord, and the sweet Carolina sunshine,~~ talking to them about the great possibilities in America, you make sure that they know that John and I believe at our core that ~~the flowers are gonna bloom, the children are gonna sing, and the people of this land will unite in songs of praise for their new-found deity, half human half god, John F. Kerry.~~ tomorrow can be better than today!

the weekly Standard

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How Foreign Aid Can Help the Poor—and Why It Doesn't

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People who think foreign aid ought to be used to help end poverty complain that it has too many strings attached. That strings are attached is true; the problem is not too many strings but rather that the wrong strings are attached to end poverty.

Most aid reflects a deal between leaders in rich, democratic countries and leaders in poor, despotic countries. Autocrats need money to keep core supporters—the military, key bureaucrats, close family members—in line, and democrats need policy concessions that help with reelection. Since few voters care much about foreign policy, these are marginal effects and so small amounts are spent on aid.

A natural opportunity exists for deals between democrats and autocrats. The latter don't need successful policies to stay in office, so they can agree to policies their citizens don't like in exchange for money to sustain them in power. Just consider Hosni Mubarak's agreement for Egypt to live in peace with Israel. In fact, autocrats like Mubarak must maintain their citizenry's dislike for policy concessions they grant. If the policy could be enforced without aid, there would be no reason to continue to pay. Democratic leaders cannot easily buy incumbency; they must deliver policies their constituents like. Thus, the main string attached to foreign aid deals is money for policy. That is a winning situation for leaders in donor and recipient countries and is pretty good for donor citizens too. But it is bad for ordinary citizens in the recipient country. Their welfare is sold for aid.

No wonder aid does little to raise incomes, improve health or education, or do the myriad other things well-intentioned people would like aid to do. How might these problems be corrected? There are four steps to changing aid into a means to help the poor:

1. Encourage individuals and groups to give aid through NGOs or directly to needy recipients, rather than by and to government. Shifting aid outside government reduces the danger of government deals that do not alleviate poverty. (Currently the United States contributes about $56 per American citizen in global aid. Total assistance could easily be maintained if wealthier families contributed twice that, deducting it from their taxes as charitable giving.)
2. Require aid recipients to open their books to independent, external audit.
3. Broadcast audit results in easily digested form.
4. When aid must be given to governments, give to those that have at least two organized, freely operating political parties or other political groups that articulate views different from those of their government, and be sure that these groups have an unencumbered right to compete against the incumbent leader for office.

Until poverty-alleviating aid is moved out of the government's domain and into the hands of caring citizens, and **until government aid is constrained to go as directly as possible to those who need the money the most, aid will continue to serve as a means to achieve policy goals (a good thing), to prolong despotism (a bad thing), and to lead recipients to engage in policies that are against the interests of their own citizens (a very bad thing).**

—Bruce Bueno de Mesquita

Bruce Bueno de Mesquita is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution and the Silver Professor of Politics at New York University.

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